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MAJOR LAWRENCE, F.L.S.

MAJOR LAWRENCE, F.L.S.

A NOVEL.

BY THE

HON. EMILY LAWLESS,

AUTHOR OF "HURRISH: A STUDY," ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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TO MY MOTHER.

Will Fate, we sometimes ask, turn kind,
And let a promised tribute find
Its laggard way to these same feet,
The same too-kindly eyes to greet?
If so then well, if not still take
This story, less for its own sake
Than for its giver's; words to you
Gilding much dross; remembering, too,
That books, like lives, are often things
'Scaped from the husk on nerveless wings.
Not launched on vigour's breezy dance,
Gay lords of Fate and Circumstance,
But playthings of the sun and wind,
Of hazards rough, and hazards kind,
And grown with little conscious plan
Less as they would than as they can.

E. L.

November, 1887.

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BOOK I.

HOME AND EXILE.

MAJOR LAWRENCE, F.L.S.

CHAPTER I.

He had only a year's leave, but, as barely two months of it were as yet expended, it seemed a reasonably long time to look forward to.

John Lawrence was thirty-two years old, and already fourteen years of his life had been spent in India. He was not quite eighteen when his father received the offer of a commission in an Indian regiment for one of his sons, and there seemed to be a good many excellent reasons why John—Johnnie as he was then called—should be the one selected. There were no very terrifying examinations to be passed in

those days, and there were five young Lawrences, all boys, and as Johnnie was neither the eldest nor the youngest, neither the cleverest, nor perceptibly the stupidest, neither his father's favourite, nor his mother's favourite, nor the favourite of any one in particular except of a crabbed old uncle, whose predilections did not count for much one way or other, as moreover he had attained the right age, it seemed in every way fitting that he should be the one selected.

He did not himself rebel against his destiny. He had not formed any very distinct ideas of India, but thought that he should perhaps like to see it. He would have preferred on the whole to have done so without having to become a soldier for the purpose. The more ornamental side of soldiering,—scarlet clothes, gold lace, admiring glances, the consciousness of entering life under the guise of a conquering hero, the sudden sense of emancipation—all that ordinarily suffuses life in general

with a roseate mist to the young recruit, did not particularly commend itself to his imagination, certainly not as much as to that of most young gentlemen of eighteen. He was a shy boy, not awkward, but often appearing so at the first glance, given to mooning about with his hands in his pockets, though with his eyes, it must be added, commendably wide open.

When he was about twelve years old an accident had befallen him, from which at the time it had seemed unlikely that he would ever entirely recover. He had fallen some thirty feet from the top of the wall of a dismantled church, where he had stationed himself to watch the return of a pair of jackdaws who were bringing up a callow family amongst the ivy, and where the treacherous masonry had suddenly given way under his feet, precipitating him downward, and half-burying him under stones and rubbish into the bargain.

The house to which he was carried on this occasion was not his own home, merely

a farmhouse which his father Mr. Lawrence, a barrister with an increasing Chancery practice, was in the habit of hiring annually, as a convenient spot for his turbulent brood to disport themselves in during the holidays. Mrs. Lawrence was not there at the time, but hurried back upon hearing of the accident, and devoted herself to the care of her injured son.

For a long time the boy lay between life and death. At last he worked his way back to life, got out of bed, and on to a pair of crutches, upon which he hobbled about with much awkwardness and considerable dissatisfaction to himself. Besides the lameness, he had a good deal of stiffness in one wrist, and a long scar upon the left side of the face, beginning at the chin and running right up the cheek, until it lost itself amongst the hair. It was not deep enough actually to disfigure him, but it gave his face a curious expression, half-humorous, half-deprecating, which had not been there before, and which from that

time forward, became one of its most distinctly marked characteristics.

Before this stage of his recovery had arrived, the period for which the farmhouse had been taken had come to an end. The other boys had gone back to school; Mr. Lawrence was settled again at his work in London, where his wife's presence was urgently called for. The question therefore arose, what was to be done with Johnnie?

The doctors desired him to have as much as possible of fresh air, and as little as possible of schooling, at any rate for some time longer. Where could he be sent? was therefore the question. Fortunately at this juncture a half-brother of his father's, a retired sea-captain, living in a little cottage upon the coast of Devonshire, volunteered, to every one's astonishment, to have the boy sent to him, and the offer was promptly and gratefully accepted. Johnnie went to Devonshire, where, the day after his arrival, he dropped one of his crutches into a deep cleft in the rocks, out

of which he had been trying to hook the skeleton of a sea-bird which had got wedged between a couple of big stones. He clambered to the top without it, and hopped back as best he could to the house, but before long got on so well that he discarded the other, and with the help of a big stick borrowed from his uncle, was soon limping all over the place nearly as actively as ever.

Captain Pelligrew Parr was what is called a "character," which means in this case that he was as crusty above the surface, and as estimable below it, as characters—at any rate in fiction and upon the stage—are supposed to be. He had left the service in a pique, (hand)ad never, as the phrase runs, repented of that act but once. He was a born salt, saturated with the flavour of the sea from the crown of his head even to the soles of his feet. There was not a sentiment, or a prejudice—and that was saying a good deal—which had not imbibed this briny flavour, and was not nearly as much a direct product of the ocean as a mussel or

a limpet. Such a man tied for life to the shore is like a herring in a fresh-water aquarium; discomfort pervades his very breathing.

Seeing that he could not habitually live on board ship, he had built himself a house, which as closely resembled a ship as one thing radically dissimilar can resemble another. Colt's Head Cottage stood upon the very brink of the shore, within easy reach of the spray, which even in the mildest weather had a playful fashion of rendering the windows upon the seaward side useless for observation, and which in bad weather it was necessary to keep out with strong iron shutters, the putting up and taking down of which was one of the chief excitements of the Captain's life.

Not only was the house close to the sea, but it stood upon a narrow neck of rock, which jutted out a good hundred yards in advance of the rest of the world, and was surrounded on three sides by the waves, which, whenever the wind was more than

usually high, rendered any ordinarily pitched conversation perfectly inaudible.

The timbers of which this house was constructed, and with which the walls of its rooms were panelled, were of drift wood picked up upon the shore, legacies of vessels long since foundered and perished. There was hardly a door or a shutter in which a careful examination might not have detected the small but suggestive hole left by the destroying tooth of the Teredo.

To any boy, but especially to a boy like Johnnie Lawrence, such a house and surroundings seemed to be what one of the quaintest and most delightful of writers has called "a handsome anticipation of Heaven;" a heaven to which the howling wind, the swirling brine, the naked rocks, the absolute treelessness, the all but total absence of vegetation, the grimness, sullenness, bleakness of everything on which the eye rested, seemed only so many additionally celestial elements.

It put the finishing touch to that inborn passion of his for poking after his inferior fellow-creatures and remote relations; watching their ways, and trying to ascertain their rather inscrutable motives, which would probably always have been observable in him, but which in this favouring medium rose at once to the foremost place in his mind. To burrow from morning till night in the rock pools, which yawned black, green, and purple below the windows; to fill every tub and washhand-basin with crawling, creeping, wriggling gentry, sending out importunate tentacles, and long spiny or gelatinous filaments; to go fishing with the Captain in his yawl, or assisting Phil Rudd, his factotum, to set lobster-pots —all this became his life, his thought by day, and his dream by night. He went home from Devonshire cured of his lameness, but radically confirmed in these inquisitive propensities, which in London proved of more plague than pleasure, and which at school brought him into perpetual

collision with the authorities. This did not much matter. Johnnie was one of those extremely well-behaved boys who never allow themselves to be interfered with, quietly and unostentatiously pursuing their own way, untroubled by other people's opinions. Though shy, he was, fortunately for himself, not self-conscious.

After this, he visited the Captain several times, never, however, remaining quite so long as upon his first visit. He never again, for one thing, fell down a wall thirty feet high, though of other adventures in furtherance of the beloved pursuit he had not a few. When the question of the Indian commission came under discussion, Captain Parr was vehemently opposed to Johnnie being despatched into exile. India a quarter of a century ago was a good deal further off, practically, than at present. A lad consigned there was like a stone dropped into the void ; the air closed in behind. His place might be vacant for a while, but the knowledge that the thing was done,

and done for life, tended to fill up the gap and to keep it filled. Captain Parr never forgave his brother for robbing him of his favourite nephew; it remained ever afterwards a sore spot in his mind, a distinct grievance. Even to him, however, poor Johnnie appeared after a while to belong to the category of things, if not lost, at any rate hopelessly mislaid. He did not forget him, as he eventually proved, but the pen was not a weapon which came comfortably or naturally to his fingers. He never wrote to his nephew, and his nephew, after a few spasmodic efforts, ceased to write to him. He too felt that he had been "dropped;" that, for the next twenty or thirty years, India, and not England, was the country to which he had to look.

It cannot be said that he accepted his lot with any glowing satisfaction. He was a decently good soldier, but hardly an enthusiastic one. Regimental life, with its recurrent round of petty obligations, was—he did not disguise it from himself—a

tediousness to him, that sense of finality which was so excessively soothing to his relations at home, not perhaps, proving equally so to him.

It is possible that he might even have dismayed those relations by throwing up the advantages that had been secured to him, and returning precipitately to England, but for two events which occurred not long after he had joined. The Mutiny was over, but its after-effects were still rumbling and muttering about, and in one sharp brush upon the Punjab frontier the native regiment to which he belonged suffered so severely, that young Lawrence found himself one fine morning gazetted a captain at the age of twenty-three. This was naturally cheering, and three months' leave, which he spent a year later amongst the Himalayas, proved even more so. Then, for the first time, he seemed to find himself genuinely face to face with Nature; not in scraps and hints, catching a glimpse here and a glimpse there, as it were behind backs, but face to face, in

the heart of one of her own fastnesses, amid a crowd of forms, new, not only to him, but in many cases at that remote period to Science herself also. He took to his old pursuits again with a will, devoting every spare moment of time to them, to the no slight bewilderment of his brother officers, whose sense of the becoming was not a little outraged by so unheard-of a variation of a subaltern's recreations. He was not unpopular, but this and a few other points about him tended to set him apart, and hinder him and them from ever thoroughly amalgamating.

He had been about eight years in India when it was his good fortune to make the acquaintance of that brilliant *savant* and physiologist, Henneker Jenkyll, since, as every one knows, grown to be a conspicuous star in the sky of science, but at that date a mere scientist adventurer or free-lance, who having some private means of his own, had gone out to India for the purpose of working up certain still obscure

problems, for which it appeared to him to offer a good, and as yet comparatively an undisputed field. In all these researches John Lawrence was able to be of considerable help, his previous studies, informal as they were, having put him into possession of a number of somewhat out-of-the-way facts, all of which were very much at his new friend's service. The two men made several expeditions together, and when in due time Professor Jenkyll returned to England, and published those researches which at once brought his name into the foremost rank of contemporary zoologists, he made handsome mention—in foot-notes and other places—of Captain Lawrence as his kind and invaluable assistant.

Some people—those who were jealous of the Professor—said that it was the least he could have done, and that in strict justice some of those laurels with which his own head was so abundantly adorned should have fallen to the lot of his undistinguished coadjutor. It is only fair to add

that this was not John Lawrence's own opinion. He was Jenkyll's jackal, he always declared, and was perfectly content to call himself so. In this capacity he did good if obscure work in the cause of zoology, and it was in recognition of his services in this respect that the Professor bestirred himself, some six or seven years later, to get his friend elected, first as associate, afterwards as member of that illustrious Society, to which it was ever afterwards our modest hero's pride and chief distinction to belong.

He had been fourteen years in India, as already stated, before he returned home. He could have obtained leave sooner, but the expense of the journey was a consideration not without weight, and it seemed wiser therefore to remain doggedly where he was for the present. At last the moment, long delayed, came, and a few weeks after receiving his majority he found himself on board of a troop-ship, bound from Bombay to Southampton.

Naturally, the world to which he returned

was not precisely the same world as the one he had sailed away from. His mother was dead, so also was one of his brothers. Two were settled in Australia, another was married and a parson in the north of Yorkshire. His father, too, had married again, and now at the age of sixty-nine was the proud parent of a couple of baby girls. Captain Parr was also dead, and this perhaps was the fact which in some ways affected our Major most, for, by the provisions of his uncle's will, Colt's Head Cottage, the paradise of his boyish days, had been left to him, with many minute directions as to the keeping of it in the same condition in which it had been left.

He did not go there immediately upon his arrival, but had not been back long before he found occasion to do so. His father's new *ménage* did not, it must be owned, entirely suit him; perhaps it would be more accurate to say, that he did not entirely suit it. His stepmother was universally spoken of as a charming young

woman, brilliant, social, popular; his father, now a judge, seemed upon the whole to be rather younger than when he last remembered him, fourteen years of unceasing forensic labour having apparently had rather a rejuvenating effect upon his constitution than otherwise. It was distinctly a successful marriage, the new Mrs. Lawrence not apparently regarding the discrepancy of age between herself and her husband as more than a picturesque and amusing element of their union. She was not at all too young for her delightful old judge, but she was certainly—it began to strike her—rather too young for her delightful old judge's son. This big bronzed man arriving from India and sitting down with an air of preoccupation at her breakfast table; not knowing a single soul of all her numerous acquaintances, or a single one of the allusions with which her conversation bristled; with a certain vague reputation for cleverness, or rather learning, but with nothing apparently to show for it; with

brown faintly-humorous eyes which followed her slowly round the room with an air of mild bewilderment; he puzzled her; he was not somehow malleable or readily assignable to any category she was acquainted with; she did not, in truth, know exactly what to make of him. He was very excellent—so she conscientiously assured all her acquaintances;—but—with a slight movement of the shoulders—just a little—a little—well, ponderous you know.

Poor John! He was perfectly aware of it!—more so probably than his sprightly stepmother gave him credit for. He felt like a bull in a china shop, a bumble-bee enclosed in the calyx of a harebell—anything suggestive of inappropriate and unwarrantable bigness, when he found himself, after his fourteen years of soldiering and bachelor existence, adrift in that decorative establishment. He had been excessively astonished when he heard of his father's second marriage, but had not felt called upon seriously to resent it. At bottom he

was rather amused by the whole aspect of affairs, and his own somewhat incongruous share in them. His sense of humour was latent, however, rather than ostensible; it was not very available for social purposes; it lurked in his eyes, but did not often reveal itself on his lips; when it did, it was half unconsciously. He was shy, too, having never entirely got over his youthful failings in that respect, and the position in which he found himself in the household was, it must be owned, trying to the susceptibilities of a man afflicted with that most uncomfortable of complaints.

He got on best with the nursery portion of the establishment. These two little sisters, who might so easily have been his daughters, were a sort of revelation to him, while he, upon his side, was promptly accepted by them as a new, and upon the whole desirable vassal and playmate. They called him Donny and Doddy, and other nursery perversions of his name; they got him down upon all-fours, and rode both

together upon his back, kicking him vigorously in the ribs to make him go faster; they fed him with comfits, and bits of stale cake, and insisted upon his drinking innumerable thimblefuls of cold currant-tea out of their dolls' teacups.—Sophonisba Maria, the largest and plainest of those ladies, and he were to be married shortly, they announced.

To these requisitions the Major submitted with the complacency of a large dog, half-astonished, half-gratified. He had an unacknowledged passion for children, as many big unexpansive men have, of whom nobody would ever have suspected it, and would have liked nothing better than to have had just such a pair of his own, if circumstances had only been good enough to allow of the possibility of such a thing, which it is plain to all rational people that they had not. There are men, as well as women, who seem born to go through the world seeing its best things mainly through other people's eyes, which is rather like seeing a fire through a

sheet of glass, which gives the light but cuts off nearly all the warmth.

In spite of the unbounded wrath and astonishment of his two little yellow-headed tyrants, the Major did not remain long in London. His father's house, outside the nursery, did not particularly suit him, and a man of thirty-three cannot spend *all* his days in a nursery, especially in his step-mother's nursery. He made various excuses for his departure, and hastened away, not without a sensation of escape, to Devonshire.

He breathed a long sigh of relief when he found himself in the train, and several more when, having driven the eight or nine miles that intervened between Colt's Head and the nearest railway station, he found himself upon the little narrow wind-scraped peninsula which he remembered so well, which he had thought of so often, the very feel of whose slippery grass and gritty rocks was so different from the feel of any other grass or rocks in the world. Here at least,

he said to himself, he would find his old self again and his old world. Here at least he was at home—as much home as he seemed destined to have.

The first day he did nothing; nothing, that is, but sit or stand, his mouth half-ajar, facing the sea. This was what he had been waiting for! this was what had kept him going during those interminable days and nights in India; this was *England!* those rocks, this tufted grass, that interminable sweep of grey! He hugged the country, metaphorically speaking, to his bosom!

Yet to ordinary observation, unstimulated by exile, Colt's Head would not have been regarded as by any means a characteristically English scene, being much more suggestive of North Scotland or West Ireland. This, however, he did not mind, rather liked it the better for. To a man, too, who has never in all his life owned any spot which he could call his own, beyond the temporary occupancy of some corner of a barrack, the mere sense of possession—even

though it were only the possession of a rickety cabin, and a few worthless acres of stones and sea thrift—is in itself an exhilaration. He sniffed the air with a sense of possession which could hardly have been greater, had all that he could sweep with his eyes been in truth his own.

His nearest neighbour was an old Lady Mordaunt, who had been a warm friend of his mother in early days, and who upon his return forthwith elected herself into a sort of amateur aunt or grandmother, insisting upon his coming to stay with her, and taking the liveliest interest in his fortunes and prospects generally.

Apart from this amiability, Lady Mordaunt was a delightful woman, her sapphire-blue eyes looking only the bluer and the brighter for the tower of white hair brushed into a sort of crown upon the top of her head, and arranged under a Spanish-looking combination of black lace. It was not an old face, though she was turned sixty, and if there were wrinkles on it, not one of

them at least betokened a mean, sordid, or dissatisfied pre-occupation. She might have suggested a Marie Antoinette who had survived her troubles, and lived to smile again. One of those crownless old queens, whose royalty no one has ever been found bold enough to question.

Lady Mordaunt, like Marie Antoinette, had had her full share of trouble, if not upon so heroic a scale. Her son Lord Helversdale—Earl of Helversdale and Kenneth, to give him his full designations—was popularly supposed to be going to the dogs as fast as race-horses and other cognate extravagances could combine to carry him. She had had another son, but he had died seven years before of malarious fever, and the first account his mother had received of his death had been through the newspapers. She had also lost two daughters, within a week of each other, of diphtheria. She rarely spoke of these troubles. It seemed as if she had lived through them, and come out again upon the other side—as if nothing

could now affect her other than superficially. She was in the enjoyment of a considerable fortune of her own, and in earlier days had lived a good deal in the world, openly preferring town to country. The last six years, however, she had spent in Devonshire, upon a property of her son's, which she had taken under her charge, and to which she devoted nearly the whole of her income. It was a dull life for a woman who in her day had tasted the sweets of social power, and had as pretty a turn for domination, too, as any old lady in the three kingdoms. That the advent of our Major was, under the circumstances, a godsend may be imagined. She laid out her plans for his advantage; consulted him upon all her most private affairs; turned over every heiress of her acquaintance with an eye to his interests; scolded him in motherly fashion whenever she considered he required it—which was frequently—would have had him take up his quarters permanently in her house, if he would have consented to do so.

He did not avail himself of these benevolences as much as he might have done. He liked Lady Mordaunt immensely, but she had a rival who, had she been a woman, would perhaps by this time have been getting a little into her decadence, but who, being superior to the foibles of humanity, seemed only in her admirer's eyes to get younger and fresher every day, and whose charms too had been additionally heightened by the obstacles which a remorseless fate had hitherto thrust in the path of his passion.

In other words he had embarked, with all the zest of a novice upon his old zoological pursuits, and daily despatched pages of closely filled memoranda to his friend Jenkyll; pages brimming over with suggestions; with new facts; with lines of investigation, which only required proper following out; contributions which that brilliant investigator, who had plenty of such fish of his own to fry, received with, it must be owned, somewhat daunting in-

difference. The immortal discoveries of one man are apt unluckily to seem a little flat and jejune to another.

It did not daunt our Major. He laughed at his own enthusiasm, but he revelled in it none the less. He dredged, he trawled, he rifled the patient bosom of the deep. He peered indefatigably night and day into his microscope. He drew diagrams and sections —very badly, to tell the truth—of the subjects under observation. Blessed, thrice blessed, is the man possessed by a hobby! For him dulness existeth not, and boredom is unknown; his solitude is never really solitude, for it is enlivened by the presence of the Beloved! Of all hobbies, too, which have been ridden since the beginning of the world, not one is so indefatigable, not one so delightful in its paces, as that bestridden by the naturalist, be he scientist or amateur, world-famous benefactor of his species, or the sorriest "mere collector" that ever aired his wants and superfluities in the columns of a penny zoological journal. In

this respect our Major may be said to occupy a midway position between the two extremes. He was no needle-eyed specialist; still more emphatically no immortal and soaring genius; had never even flattered himself that he could be either the one or the other. For all that, at the very bottom of his soul he did nourish hopes of doing good work, in some form or other, in the cause of zoologic science. It was the only form of ambition in which he ever indulged. Nothing could be less inflated than the view he took of himself in most respects; few men needed less Sir Thomas Brown's prudent advice as to the laying of early plummets on the heels of pride; few entertained saner views of their own capabilities; his tendency, in fact, had always been to underrate them. Only in this one, this to most people obscure direction, he did cherish hopes and dream dreams—hopes and dreams known only to himself. The harvest was so large, and the labourers, by comparison, so few. It did not seem an

extravagant hope to entertain, that by great pains, great care, unceasing perseverance, some little sheaf overlooked by other gleaners might come to his share.

Had he not already had his little successes? Had he not discovered no less than three distinct species of Neuroptera, and two of Hymenoptera, one of which had even been endowed with the preposterous name of Lawrenceana after its finder? It had certainly been changed again not long afterwards when a fresh revision had been made of the genus, but that, as any reasonable person would admit, was not *his* fault!

Of late, since his coming to Devonshire, a new light had dawned for him, one of greater brilliancy than any that had as yet risen upon his horizon. He had been working at the life-history of certain undistinguished marine organisms, studying, examining, comparing, it was a group fortunately well-represented upon that part of the coast. Suddenly, in the course of

these investigations, a new idea had burst upon him—as a seed-vessel bursts when the moment for its fruition has come. It was merely an indication ; a dazzling flash, and then again obscurity ; but it is through such indications, by means of such momentary flashes, that all new and epoch-creating discoveries admittedly have been evolved. This was not, it is true, exactly an epoch-creating discovery, even if it turned out to be a discovery at all, which had yet to be proved. It was merely a perception of certain affinities, certain underlying similarities which had previously, as it seemed to him, been overlooked. He saw—or believed that he saw—a bridge, thin as the thread which leads to a Mahometan paradise, but still a bridge, conducting the investigator to what might not impossibly prove to be a new departure in that particular branch of zoology. For him that bridge was, for the moment, the link with Paradise.

To explain the grounds upon which this

idea of his based its as yet infantine existence, would infallibly cause the reader to shut up this unoffending tale with a maledictory bang! Suffice it then to say that there are two orders, known respectively by the alluring titles of the Ctenophoræ and the Discophoræ—for brevity's sake we will say the C.'s and the D.'s!—whose precise modes of development and interdependence have long been a fertile source of zoologic controversy. They have been arranged, divided, and subdivided by one illustrious authority, and then again dis-arranged, re-divided, and re-subdivided upon a totally different system by another. They have been shuffled in and out, and hustled up and down amongst their zoologic kinsfolk and neighbours, until it seemed doubtful whether they would ever attain anything like a resting-place at all. Their nomenclature has been changed again and again, each time with the result of becoming more and more sesquipedalian, until the bewildered tyro, toiling in the rear of his

betters, finds his temper embittered and his brains addled under the weight of portentous syllables. It was in one of the bewildering ramifications of this bewildering group that the Major caught sight of his idea—his *fact*, he called it. He flung himself upon it as a gold-seeker upon a promising vein of auriferous quartz!

Sitting sometimes at night in the little sitting-room, which by a summary process he had turned into a zoologic laboratory—with not a soul awake but himself; without a sound except the hollow mutter and chuckle of the sea; without a movement except the small mouse-like struggles of a tiny stream, escaping one drop at a time through the earth and stones, and falling stealthily over the edge—he would be filled with a feeling of wild excitement, which to most men comes only once or twice in their lives, at some great crisis, some culminating moment of their fate. His heart would beat, his nerves tingle, his whole frame shake and quiver like a nervous girl's. In

his excitement his room would suddenly grow too small for him—it was not of commanding proportions—and he would spring to his feet, cross it with hasty steps, and gaze eagerly out westward towards the Atlantic, that Atlantic which to all who have once caught enthusiasm from its vastness, becomes the very symbol and embodiment of greatness, spiritual no less than physical. To John Lawrence, with his head full of his organic problems, it was the symbol of Life itself, that great ocean of sentient life with all its baffling problems, its bewildering, its inextricable mysteries. Was there not an Atlantic too in this direction? he would ask himself excitedly—an Atlantic which as yet had hardly been explored, whose skirts and land-locked bays were all that could be said to be known? What was all that had been done, compared to what there still remained to do? Who could tell at what moment even the least accredited of voyagers might suddenly burst into a new sea, a virgin sea

whose waves had never yet been ploughed by mortal keel ?

Just as a man who is not a great poet may yet enjoy by moments the genuine poetic rapture, so our Major, who was not a great scientist, who had not even had that preliminary training which might have enabled him to become one, had by moments his share of that electric thrill which is the guerdon of those whose names stand written in the Red-letter book of Fame. He dived, he plunged, he floated; he lost breath in waters that were too deep for him; he rose again to the surface, panting, but undefeated; he scoffed at himself, but he persevered; he dreamed, he hoped, he believed. Such at this particular moment of his career was his inside life. What the outside one was during the same period it will be the business of the following pages to relate.

CHAPTER II.

He was sitting one morning, soon after breakfast, in his shirt-sleeves before a microscope. It was a hot day, the summer, a late one that year, having arrived, as it sometimes does, with a rush, as if bent upon making up for lost time. There was not much just there for it to exercise its functions upon, unless indeed the air itself and the water are to be reckoned, for of trees, as stated, there were none, and even the flowers had been so long used to ill-usage that, save in sheltered corners, where they could tuck their petalled faces away from the blast, they seldom went to the useless trouble and expense of putting out any blossom; the very daisies having ap-

parently all been born with permanent cricks to their necks.

From where the master of the house was sitting, nothing was visible but the water and the sky above it. He might have been taking a voyage in mid sea, but for the sounds, which had all the peculiarly perturbed fractious sough of waves against a detaining shore. Every now and then, too, with a rhythmic regularity came a dull resonant thud as if the very foundations of the house were being undermined, followed by a glad exultant hissing and shooting, like the upspringing of an imprisoned sky-rocket. The Major was not thinking of these outside sounds. He had no time to do so; he was too busy. He was engaged in mounting some minute microscopic objects in Canada balsam, which, as any one who has ever tried that pastime knows, is a very delicate operation, requiring much care and nicety of manipulation.

The Canada balsam was fizzing comfortably upon a small iron tripod, beneath which

stood a lighted spirit-lamp, adding its small quota to the heat of the room. He was in the act of giving the object its final adjustment, and had just taken up a bit of thin glass with which to cover it in, and make all safe, when there came a scraping sound of wheels from the landward side of the house, followed the next moment by a sudden vigorous "rat, tat, tat, tat," upon the old sea-rusted iron door-knocker.

Even this did not at once distract our investigator. He was anxious to get the last and most critical portion of his operation safely over before he stirred; besides, who ever came to pay morning calls at the Colt's Head? Presently, however, there came the unmistakable rustling sound of a woman's dress immediately outside the door, which was quietly, almost stealthily opened, and a deep but not masculine voice said, "Wise man! In his shirt-sleeves!"

John Lawrence started up, thereby upsetting the equilibrium of his "object," which took the opportunity of escaping

amid a crowd of bubbles over the edge of the glass.

"Lady Mordaunt!" he exclaimed, in a tone of astonishment. "This is indeed an early honour!"

"More honour than pleasure! Don't deny it. Be candid; candour, you know, is your forte. I caught that glance of agony which you cast at your handiwork, as I came in! I suppose now that is the labour of a week, at least, that I have destroyed by bursting in upon you at the critical moment?"

"Not quite that!" he answered, with a laugh, at the same time casting another involuntary glance to where the "object" was fast hardening into an indistinguishable mass of pulp. "I have got another of the same kind too," he added magnanimously.

"Well, my apology must be my needs. I am in despair, and have come to you as my only salvation. Don't put on your coat. You can listen perfectly in your shirt-sleeves."

But the Major had already put on his coat. "What can I do for you, Lady Mordaunt?" he inquired, standing in an attitude of attention.

"You haven't heard my news yet." She paused; then suddenly sat down, nearly overturning a vase of salt water, in which a pink medusa was swimming languidly. "They are all coming home, John—*immediately!*" she said impressively.

"Coming? Who are coming?" he asked blankly. "Your son, do you mean, and his family?" he added, after a minute.

"Yes, all of them. Helversdale and his wife; Eleanor, the girl; a governess; and how many servants Heaven alone knows! And all upon Tuesday—not Tuesday week, but *next* Tuesday. There! What do you think of that?"

"Well, you are pleased, I suppose?"

"Pleased? Yes, I suppose, as you say, I am pleased. Of course I am delighted, but at the same time I am horribly put out. I am flustered beyond expression! How in

the world do you imagine I am to get ready for them in four days' time? Are you aware that, except in my own little corner of the house, there is not a bed that has been slept upon the last eight years?"

"And is it absolutely essential that they should be all slept in?" he inquired.

She threw up her eyes with a gesture of despair.

"What it is to talk to a man! *Everything*, I tell you, has to be done. And to add to my troubles, Crocket—the only one of the servants that is in the least to be depended upon,—who has the semblance of what can even by courtesy be called a head upon his shoulders,—is upon his back with lumbago—has not been off it for a week. So that there is literally no one in the house but the Biddys, Sukeys, and Tommys, who make up the rest of my establishment; and although Tommy is called Thomas, and considers himself my footman, you know how much of a servant he is!"

"Well, Lady Mordaunt, my head is not equal to Crocket's;—of that I am well aware; but if you will tell me exactly what is to be done, I will try and do it. Shall I come back with you now and see if we can discover some way in which I can make myself useful?"

She held out her hand. "Good man! that is what I call a friend! To tell the truth, it was that errand which brought me here this morning. I wanted to secure you. It is too bad, though, taking you from your beasts, isn't it?" she added, glancing with a smile at the work before him, the good-humoured tolerant smile of one who puts up with friends' foibles, because they are, after all, the foibles of a friend.

"Thanks, my beasts will take very good care of themselves," he answered rather drily.

He put a cover over his microscope; blew out the spirit-lamp; put the cork into the bottle of Canada balsam; replaced some specimens, which were waiting for their

turn, in a glass milk-pan which stood upon a side table; got his hat from a peg in the wall, and was ready at once to accompany her.

She stood watching these various arrangements with the same air of smiling amusement.

"Upon my word, you have made yourself very snug—in your way," she said at last, glancing round the room, and then out of the window at the great blue-grey quivering plain below. "What a pity it is that you have to go back to that wretched India! Must you go?"

"I must. My beasts, as you call them, would hardly keep me, neither would Colt's Head. If I were a sheep or a goat, it might be competent to do so, but hardly as it is. Besides, there is a pension looming ahead, which I must go back and grind for."

"Well, well, if you must, you must!" Lady Mordaunt stretched out her hand for her cloak, which was lying upon a chair. The Major put it on her, and went forward

to open the door, which led almost directly on to the porch.

"Lord and Lady Helversdale's coming is rather sudden, is it not?" he inquired, as they were going down the hill.

"Very," she answered. "It would have been less sudden and more gratifying perhaps if they had anywhere else to go to," she added, with a bitterness which seemed to escape almost involuntarily.

He looked concerned. "Are matters so bad as that?"

"They are very bad; how bad, I don't myself pretend to know. I doubt if even they do."

"And can nothing be done?"

"Everything, I fancy, that can be done has been done—so at least Mr. Price assures me — everything mortgaged that can be mortgaged; sold or let, that can be sold or let. The house in London; the one near Newmarket—that is a loss, as you may imagine, which I can reconcile myself to. This place—Mordaunt, I mean—is

safe as long as I live. Afterwards I—" She checked herself suddenly, and looked away towards a group of larches, defining themselves in pale green against the grey beyond.

John Lawrence said nothing. It was rather his habit to say nothing when he felt sorriest, and he felt very sorry indeed for Lady Mordaunt. Nominally the place was Lord Helversdale's, but every one knew that his mother had not only parted with her house in town, but seriously straitened her own means in order to save it—there being no entail—from coming into the market. Whether anything of the nature of a family collision had taken place on the occasion of her doing so, John Lawrence did not know, but it seemed, to say the least, likely, seeing that from that time to the present neither Lord or Lady Helversdale, or either of their children had set foot in Devonshire, where Lady Mordaunt had lived for the most part the life of a hermit, cheered at long intervals by the

visit of some benevolent friend; shutting up two-thirds of the house and living in a corner of the rest, but keeping the place up as it had always been kept, and giving the people that employment to which they had always been accustomed, and without which they would in many cases have found no little difficulty in keeping the wolf from their humble doors. All this was the more praiseworthy, seeing that she was not one of those women to whom the charities and minor benevolences of life fill up the whole circuit of human activities. She had a keen eye, too, for the foibles as well as for some of the reputed virtues of humanity, including that of gratitude; — hardly an advantageous qualification for the part.

They had got out of sight of the sea, had left the main road, and had reached the edge of the Mordaunt property, when their attention was caught by the sound of a vehicle behind them. Not the solid jog-jogging of a cart, nor yet the cheerful clatter and rattle of a gig—the two varieties

which constituted the staple of wheeled conveyances in those parts — but the quick alternate beat of a pair of horses' feet, and the self-important roll and rumble of a barouche. The road was narrow, and the Major went to the pony's head in order to lead it a little aside, so as to leave room for the more ambitious equipage to pass. It did not avail itself of this privilege, for just as they were coming abreast, one of the two occupants of the carriage gave a signal to the coachman to stop, and the barouche accordingly drew up exactly on a line with the pony chair, the two vehicles in their relative proportions presenting somewhat the effect of a line-of-battle ship and its accompanying launch.

The principal occupant of the barouche was a stout lady, with a mild, curiously expressionless face, a face with a rounded bulging forehead, surmounted by an elaborate pink bonnet; high-arched eyebrows over round prominent eyes; round, full, well-coloured cheeks, and a mouth with no

corners to speak of. A face irresistibly suggestive somehow of a sheep's, the most amiable sheep surely that ever nibbled grass, or baa-ed in puzzled helplessness after its offspring.

Beside this lady was seated a boy of twelve or possibly thirteen years of age. The two were sufficiently alike for him to be readily identified as her son, yet the type to which he belonged was widely, even radically dissimilar; there was nothing sheep-like or lamb-like either about him. His large, somewhat prominent eyes, dark as midnight, were very much handsomer than those of his mother, the delicacy and pallor of his face making them seem even startlingly so. The features, too, as features, were perfect; classically modelled, fastidiously delicate. A handsomer lad, in fact, it would be difficult to imagine. What gave the bystander a certain sense of discomfort in looking at him was a total want of solidity, a want even of promise of manliness, which was further brought out by the

indolent supercilious fashion in which he lolled upon the cushions. He looked sickly, he looked bored, he looked pampered, and cross. He might have reminded a traveller of one of those often beautiful but not at all attractive youths whose lives are spent within the walls of a harem, where their self-importance is nourished upon a diet hardly less deleterious than the sugary concoctions with which they ruin their digestion. Looking at him, you would have sworn that he had never faced a cold wind, wetted his feet, or made a dirt pie in his life!

"Oh, Lady Mordaunt!" this young gentleman's mother began, in rapid panting tones, occasionally catching at her breath from excess of volubility, "I hope, I'm sure, you'll excuse me stopping? I hope you won't think it a liberty; I wouldn't for anything—but when I saw who it was, I couldn't help but tell Batters to pull up; it's so long since I had the pleasure of seeing you, except in church, and that does not count, of course, for one can't talk.

Indeed I'm always on the fidgets to get away —on account, I mean, of Algernon. Such dreadful draughts as there are, especially near the door—no doubt you've noticed them yourself. And those little Puddlingtons—perhaps you haven't heard they've all got the measles—at least most of them, so it's likely to go through the rest, unless the others was sent away first—but it is best to be upon the safe side. Don't your ladyship think so?"

"I am glad you did stop and speak to me, Mrs. Cathers," Lady Mordaunt answered briskly, leaving the more complicated question of the little Puddlingtons on one side as irrelevant. "As you say, it is a long time since we've seen one another. You needn't tell me the fault is mine, I know it; I've been intending to drive over and pay you a visit for some time past, but as it happens, I've been particularly busy lately."

"Indeed, your ladyship must have a terrible deal upon your hands," the other

lady replied sympathetically. "Particular as I'm told that the Earl and family is coming home next week — are coming home," she added hastily, with a glance, not at Lady Mordaunt, but at her own youthful son, who, however, appeared perfectly indifferent to his mamma's lapses in grammar.

"Now, how in the world did you hear that, Mrs. Cathers?" Lady Mordaunt inquired with some astonishment and a tinge of vexation. "I only received my son's letter myself two days ago, and I don't think I've spoken of it to three people since."

"Oh, Lady Mordaunt, those sort of things is always known, particular in a dull place like this, you may take your word of that! There ain't—there aren't, I mean—so many Earls but what their comings and goings get talked of, and Mr. Price, his Lordship's agent, is our agent too—Algernon's, I mean—it was he mentioned the family were returning. And I

hope it wasn't indiscreet, I'm sure, my repeating it. I wouldn't for the world be the one to bring the poor man into trouble with his employers, not for anything. Of course we're his employers, too, and Algernon's property is a very good one, and improving, I'm told. Still, we're newcomers, I'm never the one to deny it, and I'd be sorry to get him into disgrace with his Lordship—very."

While this was going on, and Lady Mordaunt was reassuring Mrs. Cathers on the subject of Mr. Price's indiscretions, Major Lawrence and the other occupant of the barouche were left gazing at each other, one from his post at the pony's head, the other from his luxurious couch amongst the cushions of the carriage. The Major's first impulse had been to nod good-humouredly at the lad, and he would have followed this up with further demonstrations, but for the distinct discouragement with which his first overture was met. Everybody has at some time or other been snubbed by a

child, and therefore everybody knows the sensation, than which I am myself acquainted with few more unpleasant. This boy's beauty, and air of conscious fastidiousness, gave to his superciliousness a force which it perhaps otherwise might not have had. At any rate, the Major, who at bottom we know was shy, felt not merely snubbed, but nettled. It was nothing to him that a spoilt brat of a boy should choose to stare impertinently at him, and yet it vexed him, almost as much as if the latter had been a dozen years older. He felt a sudden impulse to pick him up by his two disdainful little shoulders, give him a good shaking, and set him down to run in the mud, by way of a hint to improve his manners. That vigorous mode of procedure being unfortunately impossible, he grew impatient, and wished that Lady Mordaunt would bring her neighbourly conversation to a conclusion. It was one thing to lose his morning, and sacrifice one of the best slides he had ever turned

out, for her sake, and quite another to be kept kicking his heels upon the roadside, and stared out of countenance by a little upsetting ape of a boy! He began to wish that he had not showed so uncalled-for an alacrity in volunteering his services. It was always a mistake, he informed himself authoritatively, to go meddling in other people's affairs. The golden rule of life was to stick to your *own*, and to leave them to settle theirs as they could. It was too late to think of that to-day, but he should take deuced good care that it didn't happen in a hurry again!

CHAPTER III.

At length the stream of Mrs. Cathers' volubility began to show signs of ebbing. Her pink bonnet nodded a succession of farewells; her son lifted his hat with an air of conscious importance to Lady Mordaunt; threw a last glance of supercilious indifference at the Major, and, with a roll and a lurch, the big coach got itself in motion, and went splashing and clattering down the narrow country road under the branches of ash and elm, which seemed to be stooping impishly down for the express purpose of clutching at the gold-braided hats so temptingly raised up almost within their grasp.

"Poor Mrs. Cathers!" Lady Mordaunt said, with a laugh, as the pony chair also

began to move on; "what a wonderful woman she is, to be sure!"

"What an unpleasant little boy she has got!" the Major could not resist saying.

"Unpleasant, is he? He is a wonderfully handsome creature—don't you think so? He always reminds me of some picture—by Velasquez, I think—one of those Spanish kings, I forget which, as a boy; the same colouring and expression."

"They must have had very nasty expressions if they were like that."

Lady Mordaunt opened her eyes slightly. "Poor little mortal, you can't but pity him," she said condoningly. "Wrapped up in cotton-wool as he is, they'll never make a man of him. He is wretchedly delicate, besides; too delicate, they say, to go to school, which would be his only salvation."

"He looks sickly," the Major said, his resentment not entirely mollified even by that extenuating circumstance. "I suppose they're very rich?" he added.

"Very, I imagine. 'Cathers' Blankets' —you see them advertised everywhere. I believe they have a shop somewhere in the City, though I can't say I've ever seen it myself. Of course Mrs. Cathers has nothing to say to all that. The old man, this boy's grandfather, bought the property here a few years before he died, so she and the child live on it. Poor soul! I fancy she finds her grandeur sufficiently wearisome. With the exception of myself, hardly anybody calls upon her. Indeed, there are very few to call. Never was there such a forsaken neighbourhood, and year by year it seems to me to be sinking deeper and deeper into the depth. I was dropping into a sort of coma when you came—rolling myself into a ball like a dormouse, or rather, like a hedgehog, with nothing but the prickles left."

They were by this time inside the lodge gates, and advancing up the avenue. Mordaunt, though large enough, was not much of a place. It had a park, where there were

a few deer, but the trees had been too roughly assailed upon the seaward side to make much effect. Most of them were gathered into clumps for mutual support, but even these, except in a few sheltered situations, were sliced diagonally on one side as if with a pruning knife, while upon the other they leaned ungracefully over, as if, tired of the struggle, they contemplated measuring their entire length upon the ground. Underneath, too, they had been gnawed away by the teeth of the deer and cattle, so that altogether it showed no little tenacity upon their part to continue to exist at all.

The house was not well placed, either. It was close to the sea, yet there was no sea-view, unless you climbed to the very tip-top, and peeped out of the garret-windows. It stood upon the side of a slope, and below extended what in the neighbourhood was called an Italian garden, though few Italians would have identified it under that name. It had been laid out by the

grandfather of the present Helversdale, who had spent a good deal of his youth upon the Continent, and had brought back plaster models of tombs, and other objects of interest. There were many parallel rows of vases raised upon pedestals and connected with slabs. There were also statues, which ought to have been of marble, but unfortunately were of a less durable material. Whatever may have been the cause, the whole effect was grim, cold, and ungrateful. At present the weather was warm, the air delightful, and although the flower-beds presented no very brilliant show, and the statues had rather a scaly and melancholy aspect, china roses and other adventurous climbers showed a kindly inclination to envelop things in general in a veil of deceptive greenery. A garden must be bad indeed not to look tolerable upon the confines of June.

Upon the house there were also creepers, though not as many as there ought to have been, for the architect's sake. Had it been

of red brick or any other warmly tinted material, as all well-disposed English houses should be, it might have brought the whole place back into tone. Unfortunately it was nothing of the sort. It was a large, glum, pseudo-classical house, with two disproportionately small wings, attached to the central block by colonnades, in which were more scaly and uncomfortable-looking statues. It was one of these wings that Lady Mordaunt inhabited. Her own rooms, being constantly lived in, were at least liveable, and out of them, on the other side, through a door cut by herself, you found your way along a path overarched with laurels into another garden, which was the very antipodes of that stony and pretentious-looking affair below. A garden lying in a sun-filled hollow, once part of a quarry, now disused, but upon the further side of which a steep bit of rock—a cliff in miniature—still rose. This cliff was densely overgrown with a tangle of bryony, of honeysuckles, ivies, and Virginian creepers, tiny toad-

flaxes hanging dainty dragon-heads out of every vertical fissure, and here and there in the season a spike of red valerian lifting its dull red flames. The china roses, too, had taken to their work here with a will. Not content with the base of the cliff, they had scrambled over the fences, and were crawling up the nearest tree-trunks, their petals dropping in a red rain over the grass, and covering the steps of a sun-dial, yellow with lichen, which had been artfully secreted in the shadiest corner. A delicious and unlooked-for retreat, pervaded by an eternal flutter of small crisp wings, by a never-ending buzzing of bees, by all manner of soft sibilant summer murmurs, deepened now and then upon gusty afternoons to a statelier measure, rolling in intermittent snatches from the base of the cliffs, the real sea-cliffs whose nearest summits were barely a quarter of a mile to the westward.

From habit, Lady Mordaunt brought the pony first to her own portion of the building. Then, remembering herself, got down,

and led the way, through a sky-lighted passage, to the central portion of the house, which was cut off from the wing by a green-baize door.

Opening this, they entered the sitting-rooms. In their present aspect these could not be called inviting. Every chair was set either with its back against the wall, or its front jammed against a table in the middle of the room. There were a good many marble-topped tables; statues too, and statuettes—copies, for the most part, of well-known originals—looking scandalized by the sudden intrusion.

They went upstairs, and wandered along half-lit passages, and in and out of bedrooms, all large, square, uninhabited, and apparently uninhabitable, all with chairs and tables presenting to the spectator a succession of legs pointing skywards. Lady Mordaunt moved actively about, measuring, explaining, calculating, getting upon chairs and step-ladders to ascertain the amount of material required, the Major dutifully following and

writing down directions, according as they occurred to her.

Two hours later he left, and was upon his way home, his pocket brimming over with long and short pieces of tape, his head with orders which he was to execute at Pinkerton, the nearest country town, where he had solemnly pledged himself personally to interview the various tradesmen concerned. That long red piece was for the upholsterer, for curtains for the large north bedroom; that shorter red piece for the ironmonger, for the register which had got out of order in the dining-room, and this small white one for the new looking-glass required in the small south bedroom destined by Lady Mordaunt for her granddaughter. He stood still in the middle of the road, and began carefully going over the directions again in his head—the long red piece, the short red piece, the little white one! It was worse than the hardest of those zoologic problems which had lately been laying siege to his brains. What if the long and the short,

the white and the red were to get mixed, and be given respectively to the wrong tradesmen? He plunged his hands feverishly into his pockets to see if they were all there!

Looking up, after reassuring himself upon this point, he perceived that he was standing at precisely the same place where he and Lady Mordaunt had a few hours ago encountered the barouche, the small marks of the pony's hoofs, and the more dignified tramplings of Mrs. Cathers' pampered steeds being still visible upon the road. The coincidence brought back the remembrance of that lady's youthful son. What an unpleasant urchin it was! he repeated to himself. He who rarely encountered a child without promptly making friends with it, felt a positive repulsion to this one. There was something about the recollections of those big black eyes, narrow features, and the supercilious turn of the well-shaped lips, that affected him almost like a physical discomfort. Yet, how ridiculous! he said

to himself, with a laugh. Why in the world should he take an antipathy to a harmless child, whom he had never seen till that morning, and in all probability never should see again? It was ridiculous, yet for all that he failed to detach it. A strong desire beset him that he never might, as a matter of fact, have to see him again, a feeling that, if he did, some harm would come of it, though how, when, or to whom, the demons of unreason alone could say.

Plainly it behoved him in ordinary self-respect to get rid of so preposterous a notion as soon as possible; drop it with his cigar-ash over the cliff; let it float away with the discarded fragments of pollen falling from the overladen thighs of the next passing bee. Such small bugs and goblins are not, however, to be discarded at will. Like other troublesome parasites, they wear grappling-hooks. Twice or three times that evening our usually reasonable friend felt the same prepossession, the same curious sense of antipathy, the same un-

accountable irritation and repulsion. It got between him and the objects in his camera lucida, even obtruding itself across the sacred images of the Ctenophoræ and the Discophoræ. He was a nasty upsetting little imp, he repeated to himself vindictively—ill-bred, spoilt, insufferable; he would certainly come to a bad end, and as certainly break the heart of that silly idolatrous woman his mother! He made these uncharitable forecastings with so much energy, that the next minute he burst out laughing at himself. What had come to him? Why in the world should he expend himself in maledictory prophecies about a wretched child whom he had only seen once for a few minutes by the roadside? All the same, he repeated to himself, he *was* a nasty imp! He hoped sincerely that he should not have to see any more of him.

CHAPTER IV.

By the time the all-important Tuesday had arrived, everything that it was possible to replace and repair at Mordaunt had been replaced and repaired. Lady Mordaunt herself was loud in her gratitude and admiration of her coadjutor's diligence, declaring that the Intelligence Department of the British Army must certainly, in her opinion, have its seat in India. The chairs and tables had all been set the right way up; beds made; pokers and tongs scoured; the chandeliers in the drawing-rooms had been uncovered, and twinkled resplendently. The whole house, in short, had a regenerated look.

The day had come, and almost the hour!

The travellers were due at seven, and it was now half-past six. Lady Mordaunt stood waiting upon the terrace, now and then returning to the house to make sure that all was as it should be. John Lawrence's share of the work was finished. He had done what he could for the comfort of the travellers, but was not at all anxious to assist in their reception. He hastened away accordingly, as soon as the last nail was in, the last carpet down, to the shelter of Colt's Head.

He had arrived, thankful to have got his task off his hands, when he discovered, not a little to his dismay, that the key of a certain wardrobe had by some inscrutable process got into his pocket! It was very annoying, the more so as that particular key would, he knew, almost certainly be wanted. There was nothing for it, therefore, but to return and deliver it up either to Lady Mordaunt herself or one of the servants.

Stepping hastily across the park twenty

minutes later, he perceived in the half-dusk a black mass of something upon the middle of the road, a mass which might have been an overturned hearse, might have been a couple of haystacks, might in fact have been almost anything, but which, as he approached, he discovered to be nothing less important than the carriages containing the expected arrivals. One was the family coach of the Mordaunts, a time-worn veteran three generations old; the other a big unwieldy vehicle which lived at the Pinkerton Railway Hotel, and was at present piled and brimming over with luggage. Three or four people were standing about the foremost carriage, now and then returning to the other, as if in consultation.

Major Lawrence quickened his steps. What could delay the travellers there at the very threshold of their goal? he wondered. Had a wheel come off? Had some one been taken ill? What was the meaning of it? There was a considerable buzzing of voices audible as he approached, but

high above the rest a shrill feminine voice speaking in extremely imperfect English.

"It has been nothink all de way but 'de sea,' 'de sea!' Every minute she has been on her feet, up der on the seat, saying that she did see it. I say, 'Chère enfant, tenez-vous tranquille, what will Madame la Comtesse say?' Den she sit down for a minute, two minute, and den up again. At last as we were coming to this leetle hill, all of a sudden she scream, 'It *is* de sea now, for I see it shine!' and before I could do nothink, she had jump out and was got into that leetle wood there! I jump too; I run after her; I call; I entreat her to come back, but she was gone! gone!" And the speaker—a plump little woman in a frayed barège dress, with the face of a doll which had seen a good deal of service in some rather hard-handed family—wound up her explanations with a flood of profuse tears.

"Who has gone? What has happened? Why do you not come on to the house?

Helversdale, for Heaven's sake, tell me what has happened!" And Lady Mordaunt appeared upon the scene, with a large lace shawl flung round her head.

"The matter is that my daughter appears to have run away!" her son answered, advancing and embracing her dutifully as he spoke. "Rather early to begin that sort of thing, isn't it? I suppose it is all right; she can't get into any harm, can she?" he added.

"Run away? Where in the world has she run to?"

"To look at the sea, it appears."

"The sea! But, good heavens, Helversdale, there are cliffs in all directions—you know that as well as I do! The child will fall over and kill herself!"

"I don't think there's any danger of that. Elly is not a baby, by any means. I've sent a footman to call her back. I'd go myself, but for this confounded foot. In any case, there is no use in our spending the rest of the evening here. Hadn't you

better get in with Adelaide, mother, you have nothing on your head?"

"Where is Adelaide?"

"Sitting quietly in the other carriage, like a reasonable woman! Do get in and let us drive on. Allow me to assist you to your seat, and compose yourself, pray, Mademoiselle," he continued, addressing himself politely to the little lady with the barège gown, who still wrung her plump hands with an air of despair, allowing the tears to stream unregarded down her cheeks. "Your pupil will return in due time, I assure you."

"But, Helversdale, how can you possibly tell anything of the sort? We can't go on like this. You don't know where the child may have got to. It will be perfectly dark, too, immediately. As for sending your servants, it is ridiculous; none of them know the way. I would go myself, only——"

"Let *me* go, Lady Mordaunt," John Lawrence said. "If you will all go on to

the house, I will follow the little girl and bring her back," he added, addressing the rest of the party collectively.

"Oh, thank you, yes, that is just the thing!" Lady Mordaunt exclaimed in a tone of relief. "Pray go at once, and bring her back. Tell her that she has frightened us dreadfully—*dreadfully*, remember!"

"I can't candidly say that she has frightened me dreadfully," Lord Helversdale said, with a smile. "But you can send any message that you think will be improving to discipline. And I am excessively obliged to Mr.—ah, yes, of course—Major Lawrence, for undertaking such a troublesome office. Naturally, I would go myself if it were not for this gout; but, as you may see, I can hardly hobble, much less clamber down cliffs after refractory daughters!"

There was no time for further politeness, so, having ascertained the exact direction in which the fugitive had disappeared, John Lawrence departed upon his errand, and

the rest of the party remounting the carriage, proceeded leisurely to the house.

The nearest way to the shore led through a small wood of sycamores, down the middle of which ran a path, fortuitous rather than intentional, crossed and recrossed at short intervals by a small stream, which had left the rocks below bare and jagged. Roots of trees straggled across it, and at the bottom it terminated in a small cliff, down which steps, worn by the feet of those who availed themselves of it as a short cut, led to the beach below.

At present the tide was far out, and the wide sandy reach was starred with big shallow pools and small rivulets reflecting the fading light in a thousand fantastic splashes. At the very edge, where the waves were showing their teeth in a line of uneven whiteness, half a dozen big rocks rose blackly out of the sand, sending jagged points before them into the water. Some of these had already been converted into islands; others were still united to the

mainland; while, again, others had their communications momentarily threatened, long creamy wreaths driven in by the returning tide sweeping along their bases, curling to meet their comrades upon the other side, and announcing their junction by a tumultuous uptossing of small white billows, which falling, shot out again in wide fan-like circles, leaving a multitudinous legacy of fast dissolving bubbles.

Upon the furthermost point of one of these half islands, defined in sharp relief against the dull silvery roughness beyond, a small erect figure was standing, its back to the shore, its face set steadily to the sea, unconscious apparently of anything that was going on behind it.

The Major quickened his steps; there was no time to be lost. Ten minutes more and it would be impossible for any standing at that point to escape paying the penalty of their heedlessness by a wetting.

The sound of his steps was lost in the thickness of the sand, and when he arrived

at the brink of the water, he hesitated a moment how to summon the fugitive without startling her. Luckily he remembered her name—

"Lady Eleanor," he said quietly.

The girl started, and made a gesture of dismissal.

"Yes, yes, I know! I'm coming," she said impatiently. "I won't be a moment now. You needn't wait. I'll follow you up immediately."

"Unless you come at once you will not be able to come at all," he replied.

This time she turned round, startled evidently by an unfamiliar voice; then reddened at finding herself face to face with a tall, responsible-looking personage, evidently a gentleman, equally evidently a stranger.

"I beg your pardon," she said confusedly. "I—I thought it was one of the servants. Did you come to call me? Dear me, the tide has got in!"

"Yes, the tide has got in, and unless you

are remarkably quick, you will not be able to get in!"

As he spoke, a fresh rush of the water came sweeping in between them, trebling the width of the channel; and though when the wave fell back it narrowed somewhat, there was still a formidable stream of salt water careering with much bubbling excitement over the sand and around the base of the rocks.

She came to the edge and stood there, gazing across the chasm. "I wonder if I could clear it?" she said in a tone of consideration, measuring the distance scientifically as she spoke with her eye. "Of *course* I could with a leaping pole. No, I must take off my shoes and stockings," she added decisively.

"You will oblige me by doing nothing of the sort," the Major replied, with at least equal decision, and before there was time for another word he had walked deliberately into the water, and was standing beside her, knee-deep in the swirling current.

"Come here, and let me lift you across," he said hastily.

"Thank you, but I don't *wish* to be lifted across," she replied, retreating a foot or two from the brink.

"Do you propose remaining where you are, then?"

"No, I am going to jump. You may give me your *hand* if you like."

"Nonsense. You can't jump; it is much too wide," he said impatiently. "Let me lift you."

"But I tell you *I can*. Now, while it is shallow!" She ran forward, caught his hand, and, before he knew what she was about, had sprung across the chasm, alighting upon the other side, not indeed quite clear of the water, but so that only one foot was caught by it.

The Major was taken by surprise. He could not, however, refuse a meed of admiration to the unexpected feat.

"Upon my word, you did that uncommonly well," he said, as he waded out. "I

had no idea any little girl could have jumped so far."

The fashion in which Lady Eleanor Mordaunt stiffened her small neck and tossed up her small chin seemed to say that she was not accustomed to consider herself as belonging to the category of little girls. "The take off was bad," she said in a business-like tone.

"Well, we must step out quickly now, so that you may get home before there is time for you to catch cold."

"Thanks, I never catch cold — hardly ever, at least; I haven't had a cold, oh, for years and years!" In spite of the emphasis with which this assertion was made, she did, however, condescend to set off walking briskly towards the house, the Major, in his soaked boots, keeping beside her.

She was tall for her age, which he had been informed was eleven. Though he had called her a little girl, she did not really look like one. She was very straight, and slight, and slim, and her skirts had the air

of having been recently outgrown. She wore a tight little black jacket, into the pockets of which her hands seemed to have an inveterate tendency to stray. When she looked at him, he had seen that her eyes were grey, with very broad black rings to the irises. There was an indefinable look about her mouth, and the somewhat pronounced curves of her chin, which betokened what is commonly called race; a look too of energy and decision not by any means necessarily an accompaniment of that distinction. She was rather angular, rather colt-like, or boy-like, but there was promise about her face, a promise which would, if fulfilled, make her, if not a beautiful, at any rate a noticeable woman. Her upper lip was extremely short, and curved like her grandmother's.

Suddenly she stopped in her rapid progression.

"What would have happened if I had remained where I was—if you hadn't come at all, I mean?" she inquired in a tone

which showed that the idea had only just occurred to her.

"Well, you would have got—wet!" he answered.

She frowned. "Of course I should have got wet!" she said impatiently. "But would the water have been deep enough to drown me? That was what I was wondering."

"That depends upon how long you stayed. Probably you would have noticed it before very long."

She shook her head. "I don't know; I don't think I should. I wasn't thinking of the tide. I was thinking—oh, I don't know—of lots of different things."

"Well, next time I stood by the sea to think of lots of different things, I think I would turn my head to the shore rather than the other way, if I were you," he observed.

She took no notice of this remark beyond walking on with her head held very erect until they were beginning to mount the

wood. Then she suddenly faced about again. "Do you suppose *you* saved my life?" she inquired rather disdainfully.

He laughed. "I think that that is a very big way of putting it. If you say I saved you from getting a ducking, it would be nearer the mark."

She shook her head again impatiently. "I've always wanted to save somebody's life," she presently added gravely. "I never did, though. I saved a puppy's life once, but that was nothing. There was no danger. It had only got caught in a trap."

"Do you wish particularly to get into danger?"

"Ye—es, rather. Don't you think it is rather—well—nice?"

"No, I don't. I think it is particularly —well, nasty," he answered. "As a soldier, it is said to be part of my business, but if you will promise not to betray me, I will confess to a distinct objection to it, if by any possibility it can be avoided."

She scanned his face gravely, as if to see whether he was in earnest.

"Of course I meant *useful* danger," she said rather loftily. "Mordaunt is going to be a soldier, too. He is going into the Guards. I don't think I should care about going into the Guards if I were a man."

"Why not?"

"I don't know, I've seen some of them, and I think they are rather Molly Coddles. You are not a Guardsman, are you?"

"Dear me, no. My regiment is in India; in the Punjaub. The men I command are brown."

"Brown?"

"Yes, with a sprinkling of yellow and black."

"Oh! And are they—nice?"

He laughed. "Pretty nice, not particularly."

"Are you going back to them soon?"

"Before long. I am home on leave for a year."

"Oh, for a whole year! that is a long time, isn't it?"

"That depends upon what you have got to do in it," the Major answered rather glumly.

They were now close to the house. So, as he was hardly in a condition to present himself, he rang the hall-door bell, and when it was answered, bade his companion a hasty "good night," and turned to retrace his way.

He had not gone far before he heard steps behind him, and an imperious little voice calling to him to stop. He stopped accordingly and turned round.

"What is it?" he inquired in a tone of surprise.

"Only that I haven't thanked you. You didn't suppose I was going to let you go without thanking you, did you? Why didn't you give me proper time?"

He laughed. "Is that all? There was nothing to thank me about," he answered. "Good night, little Lady Elly."

He was off across the grass, leaving her standing in the middle of the walk, gazing after him with an air of displeasure.

She was a nice little girl, he thought; really an uncommonly nice little girl. What a pity she would so soon be a woman! A pity, too, that things were—well, as they were in the family. Happily it was no business of his, and he would take uncommonly good care not to let himself be drawn into their affairs. These Helversdales were not his sort nor he theirs, a fact he should take remarkably good care to make clear. There was no greater folly than to let yourself get drawn into the concerns of people who were no kith or kin of yours, and with whom you had absolutely nothing in common.

By the time he had come to this prudent resolution, he was once more within the boundary of that isolated little spot of earth which called him lord. One end of the house—the part where his own den was situated—showed a pale glow of light, which

fell in a greenish shower upon a row of tall tree-mallows which edged the brink. Standing where he was, you might have taken the whole thing for some luminous beetle or phosphorescent mollusk perched upon the edge, and not quite certain to which of the two elements it belonged. It was an incongruous, not to say ridiculous abode, for a man who was neither a pilot nor a smuggler, but John Lawrence happily did not think of that. To him, for the time being, it represented home, and he quickened his steps as a man does when he nears his own abode.

He found his frugal meal waiting for him, and after hastily despatching it, settled down for the evening with his microscope and a green-shaded lamp, becoming forthwith absorbed in the entrancing intricacies of the Ctenophoræ and Discophoræ. More than ever he felt convinced that he had hit upon a vein of true ore; one which only needed proper working to prove an Eldorado.

He sat up deep into the small hours,

writing an elaborate statement to Professor Jenkyll, to go by the following morning's post. As for little Elly Mordaunt and the Helversdales, he had almost forgotten they existed.

CHAPTER V.

Major Lawrence's life at Colt's Head was the life of any man living alone, who has a hobby to expend his energies upon, and ideas enough to keep his wits salt and crisp. It had its dull moments, as all our lives have, but it had its many good ones. The relative merits of the life solitary and the life social have been pretty well disputed, yet a good deal remains to be said on the subject, especially, perhaps, upon the side of the former. Such solitude as John Lawrence's was of course comparative only, not absolute. He had not his own bed to make, or even his own boots to black. There was an old woman called Sall—she had apparently no surname—who

cooked for him in a dark little hole of a kitchen at the bottom of the house. There was also the old fellow called Phil Judd, half fisherman, half body-servant, who stood to the proprietor of Colt's Head in much the same relationship that a Venetian gondolier does to his patron; "did" for him generally indoors, cleaned his boots, fetched his hot water, and waited upon him in a spasmodic and intermittent fashion. These duties over, Phil would betake himself to the boat—it was called "Arethusa" after Captain Parr's first ship—in which he would disappear for hours at a time upon private fishing excursions, not always forthcoming the next time his services were required.

Aided by a stout lad to pull in the coils of rope, it was also Phil Judd's duty to accompany his master upon his dredging expeditions, which sometimes extended to a good many consecutive hours. From the bottom of his soul Phil loathed these expeditions, not on account of the labour,

but the degradation. How any gentleman —not otherwise a fool—could spend his time scraping a net over sand for the sake of securing—not fish, lobsters, oysters, or anything any reasonable soul could desire —but bits of seaweed, or dirty little jelly stuffs no bigger than the top of a man's nail, was inconceivable. Even if by accident better things were secured by the dredge, it was as likely as not that the Major would have thrown them overboard, in order to keep the thwarts clear for his trash, "wich he does be a-sticking into them glass bottles of his'n, and a gloating over," Phil informed a sympathetic friend, "as if he was a day scholard and they dirts lollypops!" It made him feel hot when the other fishermen used laughingly to ask what they had been taking, and he was obliged to confess that, except for trash which ought to have been left in its proper place at the bottom of the sea, they never brought in, or were intended to bring in, anything at all.

Of late these excursions had been rather intermittent, the Major's time and energies having, as we have seen, been otherwise occupied. He was delighted to serve Lady Mordaunt to the best of his ability, nevertheless he had a feeling that sooner or later it would be necessary to put his foot down. The feminine sex, he was aware, are given to encroaching. Give them an inch, and they take an ell. Let a man once give up his time and liberty to them, the chances are he never gets them to himself again. Most of the commissions he had undertaken were by this time accomplished, still there were a certain number that required finishing—a kitchen boiler which had got out of order, an evil-tempered chimney which persisted in smoking—and as regards both he had to interview the respective authorities at Pinkerton, and report their answers to his principal.

As a consequence he was obliged to return to Mordaunt the next morning, the

morning, that is, after the events recorded in the last chapter. He was a little bored by this necessity. His momentary interview with Lord Helversdale and Kenneth had not left a particularly pleasant impression. They had known one another formerly, but that was seventeen years ago. There was now a Lady Helversdale, too, to be faced; a strange fine lady,—a dismally formidable object in a shy man's eyes.

He made up his mind that his visit should not be to them, but to Lady Mordaunt, and with that determination walked over about an hour before luncheon, and made his way to her end of the house.

The manœuvre was not particularly successful, for she was not there. He refused to have her sent for, and took up a book to fill the time till she appeared. This did not occur till after a considerable interval, and when she did arrive it was evident that she was in no humour to concentrate her attention unreservedly upon boilers, and smoking chimneys. She looked ruffled

—more than ruffled—cross. Nor was he long in learning the cause.

"Really, some people——" She stopped, but the fountain of displeasure was too strong to be repressed, and she presently began again—

"That daughter-in-law of mine is the most maddeningly provoking woman in the whole world! I suppose it is very wrong prejudicing you against her, but there are some people whom one can *not* hold one's tongue about, and as I have registered a solemn vow never to allow myself the satisfaction of discussing her with Helversdale, I foresee that I must have some safety-valve during the period of their visit, so you may as well accustom yourself to the fact at once!"

"What has the poor lady done now?" he inquired in a tone of mock commiseration.

"Done!" Lady Mordaunt all but danced, her blue eyes flashing like steel under her white hair. The Major watched

her with suppressed amusement. It was his old friend's favourite conviction, he was aware, that all her son's misfortunes and extravagances dated from his marriage. He did not know enough about the circumstances to be able to contradict her, but his impression was that it was to a great degree a motherly delusion. She did not like her daughter-in-law, and that was all, few people did appear to like the poor woman, whatever the reason was. She had been the daughter of a sporting baronet, at whose house her husband had perhaps been thrown a little more into the society of the ringleaders of the Turf than might otherwise have been the case. The difference was in all probability not very great, and as far as he could learn, she had, latterly at any rate, done her utmost to set a limit to her husband's extravagance. It was certainly her interest to do so.

Lady Mordaunt continued to gaze in front of her, tapping her fingers irritably upon the top of a table.

"Listen," she said. "You saw that little woman—Mlle. Panache, her name is—who was sobbing upon the grass yesterday evening?"

The Major nodded.

"Well, she is a little idiot—any one can see it at a glance—and no doubt my granddaughter would be better for some one with a little more backbone. Still she has been with her six years, and the child is fond of her, and she is devoted to the child—who, between ourselves, has not had so many people to be devoted to her. Well, what must Lady Helversdale do this morning but send for the wretched little woman to her bedroom, and give her a harangue about her want of authority over her pupil—as if any one couldn't see, by looking at the two, which was likely to exercise authority over the other! That was not all. The unfortunate little creature has made herself sick with sobbing, and my daughter-in-law—encouraged, I suppose, by so successful a result—went on to lecture her generally

about her deportment, manners, conversation, — Heaven knows what all! Isn't there a proverb somewhere about arousing the fury of the dove? At any rate, this particular dove turned suddenly upon her assailant with beak and claws. Gave her a piece of her mind—so far as she can be said to have such a possession—and wound up by declaring that she would leave the house at once; that nothing would induce her to remain where—not her capacity, but her gentility—had been called in question. Of course there was a frightful fuss. At first Lady Helversdale was resolved to let the woman go, declaring that it was impossible to overlook such unheard-of impertinence, but after a while, remembering the difficulty of replacing her—her salary, it seems, is a trifle — she decided to let the affair rest for the present. Mlle. Panache, however, is implacable. She has been in floods of tears ever since; Elly has been in floods of tears; the whole house has been convulsed; nevertheless she sticks

to her point. To have been told that she was not *comme il faut* is worse evidently a hundred times than if she had been told she was a thief—*Enfin*, nothing will satisfy her but to go."

The Major rubbed his chin. He did not see how all this concerned him. "And what does your son say?" he inquired.

"Helversdale? Helversdale says nothing; Helversdale never does say anything!"

Lady Mordaunt walked over to the window, and stood drumming her finger impatiently upon the wood-work.

"But I must be going," she added, turning suddenly round. "Oh, by the way, I promised to bring you with me. They want to see you; to thank you, I believe, for bringing back that small troublesome last night."

"They are too good, but I would rather be excused," he replied.

"You won't come?"

"I would much rather not."

"But if I ask you?"

"Please do not do so."

"But when I tell you I *wish* you to come?"

He took up his hat with a groan, and followed her along the passage.

If the drawing-room looked a shade less uninhabitable than when he had first seen it, the change hardly amounted to making it seem liveable. Its present occupant did not give the impression either of being one of those women who have the gift of making any space they occupy — were it the fore cabin of an emigrant ship, or a piece of the Great Sahara—instantly, and inevitably, a home. Lady Helversdale was a tall, thin woman, with a small head, a long neck, and a receding chin. At the time of her marriage she had been spoken of as a beauty, and that time was hardly sufficiently remote to cause her to cease to be so spoken of still. It would have required a very strong predisposition in her favour, however, to discover much positive beauty about her appearance at present. The features, no doubt, were

good, with the exception of the upper lip, which was too long for symmetry, and had the effect of having been elongated by the down-drooping tendency of the corners of the lower one. It was a face in which one seemed to see traces of a struggle. There was self-satisfaction and irritability, there was vanity, and there was dissatisfaction, and the irritability and dissatisfaction were gaining the day. There were lines about the neighbourhood of Lady Helversdale's mouth which seemed perpetually to be saying, "How vexatious!" "How excessively annoying!" even when words of perfectly amiable import were passing her lips.

At the present moment this expression was evidently in accordance with the sentiments which occupied her mind. She received the Major with due graciousness, and made some amiable allusion to his services of the preceding evening. Even while doing so, however, her thoughts were obviously unable to detach themselves from

those recent domestic disturbances of which Lady Mordaunt had spoken. A large red morocco account-book lay open before her upon the table, with figures formidably ascending, at which every now and then she cast a glance. It was evident that those figures were not behaving as they ought.

They had not been many minutes in the room before Lord Helversdale entered. As he has not been formally presented to the reader, it may be mentioned that he was slight, dark, and middle-sized; like his mother, and yet unlike; the same air of distinction, the same features, yet in all essentials far as the poles asunder. His hair was slightly grey — had the effect indeed of having been lightly powdered— but his beard, which was short and pointed, was still dark as ebony. If she had the air of a dethroned queen, he had succeeded in acquiring the carriage of a man upon whom Fate has exhausted its malice, but whose philosophy, or whose fortitude, have been

equal to the ordeal. He was not, in most people's opinion, a very estimable man, but he had the talent—by no means a despicable one—of maintaining his personal dignity in the teeth of the most adverse circumstances. You might have the worst opinion of Lord Helversdale and Kenneth, but it was rarely till he was at some little distance that that opinion found expression.

He and John Lawrence had known one another in their boyish days, but never intimately. The former was some four or five years the elder, and that alone might have proved sufficient bar. Now that they met again, the difference seemed to have increased rather than diminished. John was never regarded as young for his age, and looked his thirty-two years fully, but then the other man might have passed for fifty. Race-horses or something had left indestructible traces upon his face. They had not impaired its distinction or even its beauty, still there they were, legible as the successive inscriptions upon a palimpsest.

He had lived, as the phrase runs, every day of his life, and every day had told.

They were still running over the somewhat thin thread of mutual recollections, when the gong sounded for luncheon. Lady Helversdale promptly rang the bell, and desired in a tone of authority that her daughter and Mlle. Panache should be summoned to that meal; whereupon the Major precipitately picked up his hat.

"Going, John?" Lady Mordaunt exclaimed.

"Yes; I—I have an engagement," he stammered.

"Put it off, and stay lunch."

"I cannot; indeed I cannot. I really have an engagement."

"It must be tryst with a jelly-fish, then, or an assignation with a tender susceptible sea anemone, nothing else could be of so much importance!" Then before he could answer — "There, there, don't betray the tender secret! Promise one thing though, promise that you will dine here the day

after to-morrow. Then I will let you off."

"I shall be delighted."

"You look it, I must say! However, we must hope that you will have acquired resignation before the time comes. We are not jelly-fish, unfortunately, still we may safely promise to be nearly as dull."

He was standing beside the door, and had put out his hand to turn the handle, when it was energetically turned upon the other side, the door was widely, it may be said pompously thrown open, and the youthful Lady Eleanor Mordaunt appeared upon the scene, ushering her governess before her.

The unfortunate Mlle. Panache's face was so swollen with inordinate weeping, as hardly to be recognizable by this time as human. If the evening before it had resembled that of a doll that had seen a good deal of service in a hard-handed family, to-day it resembled nothing so much as the same doll's face after being heartlessly

exposed to the action of the nursery fire! Her lips were double their natural size; her eyes swollen nearly out of her head; as to her nose, it was indescribable. Her general air and demeanour was that of a sacrificial sheep.

Her pupil had evidently been crying too, but with her, grief or indignation had taken a different direction. Her eyes were red and her face pale, but she carried her head like a young lioness. As she came in, she glanced round the room with a look which seemed to defy the world at large, and her family in particular, to single combat. She was dressed in a little plain brown frock, covered with a blue apron, which was fastened with two buttons at the shoulders. Her hair, which hung straight down her back, was brushed away from her forehead and tied with a ribbon at the top of her head, her short skirts showed a considerable length of black tightly-gartered stockings, ending in a pair of stout unpolished shoes. This plainness and childishness

seemed only to heighten the effect of that fiery youthful indignation which sat so conspicuously upon her brow. She looked round the circle with eyes which seemed to dilate and kindle. Through it, nevertheless, there pierced something childish and appealing. An experienced bystander would have suspected that a breakdown was not very far off. The Major felt instinctively sorry for her.

She relaxed a little in the severity of her deportment upon catching sight of him, and walked across the room to shake hands. Even while speaking to him she kept her eye turned toward the sofa, into a corner of which Mlle. Panache had subsided, and there was an air of conscious protectiveness in the glance, comically at variance with what was supposed to be the relative position of the two.

"Eleanor, come here," her mother said peevishly. Then, when the girl had obeyed: "Why did you not put on your new foulard, instead of that shabby old thing?"

she inquired, in a tone audible to the room.

"I don't know, mother. I wasn't thinking about it."

"You *should* have been thinking about it, then! What is the use of getting you proper things to wear if you persist in not wearing them? Any one would say *I* didn't care what you wore!" Lady Helversdale's face assumed an expression of unmerited ill-usage.

Her daughter made no further attempt to excuse herself, merely looked at her mother with eyes which seemed to get larger and larger.

The gong had sounded, but luncheon was not yet announced. The Major was about to renew his adieux, Lord Helversdale had taken up a newspaper, when there came a startling interruption from the sofa in the corner.

Evidently Mlle. Panache had been struggling heroically to stifle her sobs ever since her entrance, but whether her over-wrought

feelings had got the better of her self-control, or whether Lady Helversdale's remarks had given them a fresh impulse, all at once she broke into a succession of resounding sobs, which grew louder and louder, until they approached rapidly to the verge of hysterics. With a last remnant of self-control she suddenly started to her feet and made for the door, her dress catching as she did so upon the handle, and giving a loud discordant shriek of rent material as she escaped. Her pupil rushed after her, giving upon her own account a Parthian glance of wrath and indignation around the circle, and shutting the door behind her with a commanding bang.

Everybody started. Lord Helversdale gave utterance to a slight whistle.

"Upon my word; here are heroics!" he said. "Lawrence, you may thank your stars you are not a family man! Really I must apologize to the company at large for such a little termagant! I cannot imagine what has come to her," he added

in a lower tone to his mother. "She used to be a decently behaved child, at least, I had no direct evidence to the contrary."

"I'm sure, Helversdale, no one can say it is *my* fault," his wife said, in the tone of a woman whose life has been one long struggle with destiny, and who at last begins to despair. "Eleanor has got completely out of *my* hands. What with staying down all that time at Shoreham, while we were in London, and running wild about the country like a great boy, and having no one with her but that dreadful little Mademoiselle—whom I was very wrong, I know, to have kept so long, only governesses are such *impossible* things to find—she has got into the most dreadfully unmanageable ways—not like any child *I* ever saw."

The door opened, and luncheon was announced. Lady Mordaunt sprang to her feet with an air of relief.

"Send her to me next time you want to get rid of her, Adelaide," she said quickly;

"I will see that she is kept in order. Good-bye, Major, if you won't stay, and my compliments to the cuttle-fishes. Don't let them make you forget that you are engaged to dine here on Friday!"

CHAPTER VI.

Walking home, John Lawrence's thoughts reverted with not a little amusement to the scene he had just witnessed. At the time it had not amused him particularly—domestic squabbles rarely do amuse a by-stander at the time. Now, however, that he had got away, was by himself, and free to allow his risible muscles to behave as they liked, he found himself laughing aloud over the recollection. What a little spitfire she was, that Elly Mordaunt! How she glared at them all, as if to defy them then and there to mortal combat! Could she care for that little washed-out rag of a Frenchwoman, or was it merely opposition —determination not to submit to authority —general "cussedness," in short, which

had made her espouse her part? From Lady Mordaunt's account they had been thrown a good deal together, so that it was conceivable that, in the absence of anything better, the girl had imbibed a sort of affection for that limp-looking specimen of humanity. How well she had looked, the monkey, when she had rushed out of the room, flinging unutterable defiance in their teeth as she did so! She was a "handful," that was clear, but for all that his sympathies had been entirely with her in the recent squabble. What a ridiculous storm in a teacup it was! he thought, with a laugh —the easy laugh of the bachelor and irresponsible bystander. Did all families behave as absurdly, when you came to see a little below the surface? He had seen so little himself of family life for the last fourteen years that the inquiry had a certain physiological or psychological interest. It was like making acquaintance with some new variety of Crinoid or Echinodermata, whose "life-history" had been imperfectly elucidated.

When the appointed Friday came, this particular storm seemed to have settled down again. Mademoiselle Panache, as he learned from a casual observation of Lady Mordaunt's, had carried out her threat and departed, but no further allusion was made to the affair by any of the family, and he naturally abstained from speaking of it himself. Elly he did inquire after, and was told in a somewhat reproving tone by her mother that she had gone to bed; she always went to bed, the Countess said, at eight o'clock; it was the proper hour for little girls; she didn't approve of turning children of eleven or twelve into premature women by keeping them up till all hours of the night; *some* of her friends did so, but she had never given in to the habit. It was ruinous to the complexion, and there was nothing so important for a girl as her complexion.

The Major had no very apposite observations to contribute to these statements. Not being a family man himself, he could

not say what was or was not detrimental to the complexion of little girls of eleven or twelve. He had some imagination, however, and he could not help wondering whether all that superfluous energy, of which he had so lately seen specimens, was invariably ready to be put to bed and to sleep exactly as the clock struck eight? Even if the first part of the ceremony was gone through, he rather doubted that the second would follow as a consequence. A vision of a pair of big grey eyes staring eagerly wide awake into the darkness, crossed his mind. He was not too old himself to remember being sent to bed at eight o'clock, and the sense of wrong and intolerable tyranny which the proceeding had aroused. How for hours he had lain awake and thought of moths—in those days moths happened to be the principal tenants of his youthful brains. Never since the world began had such moths been seen as were at that moment flying about in the dusk outside, and which he was debarred

from securing solely by this ridiculous family regulation of an eight o'clock bed-hour! It was not likely that Elly Mordaunt's brains were disturbed by a vision of moths. Still that she would meekly lie down and go to sleep because she was told that it was the best thing in the world for little girls' complexions was a statement which, from what he had seen of her, he was not at all inclined to believe!

The family party was not intruded upon by any other stranger. The evening was not particularly lively, and Lady Mordaunt's promise was more than fulfilled. It seemed to John Lawrence interminable, though in reality it was rather short. Lord Helversdale's gout was apparently worse, at least he limped more than before, and a foot-rest had to be arranged before he could sit down to dinner. After the ladies had withdrawn, the conversation between the two men languished. The host pushed his mother's claret about with due hospitality, but he looked at the contents of his wine-glass

much more than at his companion. Even sport and coming "events," which the Major, in despair of hitting upon a mutual topic, broached, failed. Lord Helversdale answered, but his manner was chilly to torpidity. Like many men of his type, he could talk, and talk well, but his talk needed the circumference of his own set. If you belonged to that set, you understood at half a word; if you didn't, it was practically waste of time addressing you at all. Naturally, John Lawrence did not belong to that or any other current set, and Lord Helversdale's feeling therefore was that they had no more mutual standing-ground than if he had been a curate or a district visitor. Had he been asked, he would probably have been prepared to say that his mother's pet was a very decent sort of fellow, in his way; but what then? Curates and district visitors are probably very decent sort of people often in *their* way, but it doesn't follow that you would have anything in common with them.

The only approach to relaxation which

the visitor derived from his evening's entertainment was ten minutes' conversation which he had with Lady Mordaunt, after her son had withdrawn, and while Lady Helversdale was writing a note in the inner drawing-room.

"So your exasperated dove has departed?" he said, sitting down close to the corner of the sofa where she was sitting, engaged in a piece of needlework. He had never seen her with a needle in her hand before.

"Poor little mortal! yes," she answered, laying that weapon aside with an air of relief. "At the end I am sure she would have given her ears—six months' salary at all events—to stay, but it was too late, the carriage was actually at the door. Never did I see so deplorable a spectacle. She positively realized the classical fable of Niobe and her fountain. I'm certain the carriage contained more tears than woman."

"And her pupil. Was she another Niobe?"

"Not the least. Quite the contrary. She

looked as hard as that"—holding out the top of her needle—"I don't think she could have cared two straws about the woman. It was simply she had set her mind to prevent her going away. I can't make that child out. Last time I had anything to say to her she was a little soft round thing, you would have said without any character at all. Now you see what she is—a perfect spitfire—a termagant in miniature. She is an obstinate little wretch too. I called to her afterwards as she was going up the stairs, but, though I know she heard me perfectly, she walked away with her head in the air, and her hands in her pockets. I'm not sure she wasn't whistling!"

The Major laughed. But Lady Mordaunt was evidently not disposed to regard such infractions of respect as a light offence.

"You may laugh, but allow me to remind you she is not *your* granddaughter," she said sharply.

"Well, now you mention it, I suppose she is not," he answered.

"I am far from saying that it is entirely the child's fault," she went on unheedingly. "Many things have been against her. She has been far too much alone, which may have taught her to assume these extraordinary airs of independence; whatever it is, the result promises to be anything but satisfactory. If she were a boy she might be sent to school, where she would be brought under proper discipline; as it is, I despair."

"Don't do that. I think she is a grand little girl. I really do. I like her immensely! Perhaps you don't understand her."

Lady Mordaunt opened her eyes, and flashed them at him like a pair of rapiers. "Upon my word, young man, what next?" she exclaimed indignantly.

"I mean that I am sure there is more in her than any of you guess."

"More! I don't doubt *that* at all. There's a great deal of temper; a great deal of self-will; a great deal of naughtiness.

Whether all those qualities are likely to combine into a satisfactory granddaughter is what I do beg leave to question!"

John Lawrence shook his head. He had never known his old friend so little reasonable.

"No doubt there's a good deal of what you say," he answered, "still I maintain that there's no harm in her. It is simply high spirits—what in a boy one would call manliness—nothing else. She is a fine little girl, and I prophesy will turn out all right yet. Of course I have only seen her twice; nevertheless——"

"Nevertheless you think yourself a better judge of her disposition than I am? Not to speak of her own father and mother!"

"I think that you are all inclined to judge her too harshly. Children are 'kittle cattle,' remember; once miss the right clue, and you may go on missing it to the end of the chapter."

The rustle of Lady Helversdale's dress was heard approaching; Lady Mordaunt

sat erect, shook out her skirts with an air of majesty, took up her needle, and prepared for a parting shot.

"You may be an admirable judge of the dispositions of jelly-fishes and sea-urchins, young man," she said cuttingly. "No doubt you are. But if you think that you understand the character of my own granddaughter better than I do myself, all I can say is, your vanity misleads you."

The "young man" laughed. He was not in the least offended. His vanity was not his most salient point. He would have returned to the charge, but there was no time, Lady Helversdale was already in the room. Not long afterwards he took his leave, and the ladies retired to their beds. It had not been a delightful evening!

Old Crockett, Lady Mordaunt's major-domo, was hovering about the hall, and came forward to help him with his coat, and in answer to an inquiry after the lumbago, shook his head lugubriously, as much as to say that there were worse things in the

world than even lumbago. The Major was not inclined to gratify his evident desire for a little family gossip, so merely wished him a cheerful good night, to which the old man responded in a sepulchral tone, shutting the house door behind him as elaborately as if some one at the point of death was likely to be disturbed by its reverberation.

John laughed a little when he found himself outside upon the gravel. The old fellow's ultra-lugubriousness had had the effect of raising his spirits, lowered as they had been by the repressive atmosphere which had newly invaded that friendly domicile. It was a lovely moonlight night. The tortuous shadows of the trees lay in long crooked silhouettes upon the grass, cut out seemingly in black paper. The statues in the garden appeared to be holding an entertainment. You would have sworn that they nodded and beckoned to one another across the gravel. The fancy took our hero to walk home by the sea, instead of through the park. It was hardly further, although the

undulation of the coast made it seem so. The quickest way was to pass through Lady Mordaunt's little rock garden, which, as already explained, lay behind that wing of the house which she had taken as her special possession. There was a path leading to it through a patch of shrubbery. It would have been difficult to find had the night been dark, but at present the entrance lay clear as the mouth of a small stream, though once inside, he found himself in an obscurity intensified, rather than lightened, by the scraps of sky showing at intervals through the network of leaves and twigs.

It was with a sort of surprise that he emerged into the illuminated circumference of the rock garden, which appeared to have absorbed all the neighbouring moonbeams. He was turning away, when he suddenly observed something or some one moving on the edge of the obscurity which surrounded, and as it were hemmed in, this whiteness, something that appeared to be partly black and partly white, and seemed to flit or glide

along the ground. The patch of moonlight was so bewildering, the jungle of rose-bushes at that particular corner so thick, that it was difficult to make sure that he had not been deceived. Still he did not think that his eyes could have played him such a trick. Why should they have selected this particular evening to do so?

He felt his pulses quicken. Who could be out at that hour, and in so secluded a spot? He must have been mistaken; it could have been nothing, or merely the light playing upon the surface of the leaves. But no, again he distinctly saw something moving swiftly, and this time it seemed to him that it had taken shelter behind the old sundial which stood at that particular spot, and behind whose square base a fragment of something white was visible.

He hesitated what to do. The figure, whatever it was, was feminine, since it wore a skirt. If it was one of the maids of the house, although she had no business assuredly to be out there at that hour, he

had, still more assuredly, no desire to discover her delinquencies. Upon the other hand, the figure was alone—a fact which made against this hypothesis! He decided that it would be wiser to pass on and take no notice. His curiosity, however, was by this time aroused; and the momentary colloquy ended by his suddenly taking half a dozen rapid steps towards the sundial, calling out loudly, as he did so, to know who was there?

He was answered by the sudden darting away of the figure, which, escaping from behind the sundial, shot like a greyhound between the rose-bushes, out of the precincts of the garden, betaking itself to the little wood beyond, where it was seen flitting from tree to tree and from bush to bush, with the rapid gliding step of some woodland elf, or pixy.

A momentary pause of astonishment, and the Major gave chase. His doubts as to the propriety of his interference were at an end. The most elementary of all instincts, the

instinct of the hunter, was aroused. To come up with this fugitive, who, it seemed, had challenged him to a race, was the only thing to be thought of.

Had the person he was pursuing been entirely dressed in black he would have probably found it impossible to do so; but that patch of white was a beacon, and he kept it in sight. It was a hot chase. Now he nearly overtook his prey, then again it darted behind the trunk of a tree, or was lost to sight for a minute or two in the tall brushwood.

Fortune, however, was in favour of the pursuer. The wood was small, and was rapidly narrowing; the streaks of light which permeated it getting broader and broader; the herbage too was growing denser underfoot, the big docks and mulleins catching at the fugitive's feet and dress. He was in the act of coming alongside of it, when it suddenly shot out into the open moonlight.

Once again the Major halted, and this time

from sheer astonishment, for in the figure flitting before him, lit up distinctly by the moonlight, he perceived the youthful Lady Eleanor Mordaunt whom he had been assured by the Countess, her mamma, to be in bed and asleep nearly three hours before !

It was obviously not a reason for slackening his pace, and he again sped on in full pursuit. His halt, momentary as it was, had given the fugitive a fresh start, of which she took full advantage. John Lawrence was an active man and a good runner, but it was quite as much as he could do to come up to that small figure, which seemed to be endowed with wings. They were now racing straight across the middle of the park; clearly visible, no doubt, from the windows of the house, had any one thought of looking out. He called once, twice, but she took no notice, but sped on, as if weariness were impossible. It was the oddest race conceivable.

Suddenly she wheeled close to the place

where the carriage had halted the evening of their arrival, and made for the path leading to the sea. This brought matters to a climax. To race down that path at this hour of the night, and at the pace she was now going, was about as hazardous a proceeding as could well be conceived. Putting out all his powers, the Major overtook her just as she was turning into it, and seized her by the arm. "Stop, Lady Eleanor! Stop! Are you not ashamed of yourself?" he remonstrated breathlessly.

She wrenched her arm away from his grasp, so that he could not have retained it without hurting her. She made no attempt to run away again, however, but stood facing him, her breath coming fast, her chest heaving up and down, but her eyes dilated, and blazing fierce defiance at him in the moonlight.

"How dare you?" she said, as soon as she could speak, stamping her foot vehemently upon the ground. "How dare you? How dare you? I hate you!"

"Hate me as much as you choose, but come home. It is not fit for you to be out at this hour."

"Why is it not fit? I am not doing anybody any harm!"

"Ask yourself. Does any one know that you are out?"

She hesitated. "No, no one knows, of course!" she said at last, defiantly.

"Very well then, that answers your question. Doing what nobody suspects is deceiving."

She flushed angrily. "I'm not deceiving," she exclaimed angrily. "There is nothing the least deceitful about it!"

"Excuse me, that is just what there is. Doesn't every one believe you to be in bed and asleep, whereas in reality you are careering about the deer park with me at your heels?"

"I never wanted to have you at my heels, did I? Besides, why should they send me to bed so early? Nobody can go to sleep at such an hour."

"Lady Helversdale told me eight o'clock was your usual bed-time."

"When Matty and I were alone at Shoreham I never went to bed till nine or ten."

He took out his watch and slanted it, so as to catch the moonlight. "It wants twenty minutes of twelve now!" he said dryly. "Most people think that a good hour for being in bed."

She looked a little aghast, and turned of her own accord towards the house. "I couldn't sleep," she said in a tone of extenuation. "That was why I went out."

They proceeded together side by side to the house. Now that the glow produced by her scamper had faded away, he could see that she had been crying; her eyes were red and swollen, her cheeks were stained, her hair hung in elf locks about her face. It made him feel tenderly towards her. "Poor little mortal, what a bit of wild untamable nature it was!" he thought. It must be *somebody's* fault that a little girl of eleven should have to rush out of doors in the dead

of night in order to confide her woes to the beech-trees and the rose-bushes? He remembered appealing often to the same comforters himself in youthful days, but then he had been a boy. It seemed less natural, somehow, in a girl.

He was making his way to the front door, but she stopped him with a gesture. "I won't go there," she said abruptly. "I won't, I tell you! I won't!"

"How do you propose to get in, then?" he asked.

"Through that door"—pointing to the one leading to Lady Mordaunt's part of the house. "That was the way I came out."

"It will be locked at this hour. However, just as you like," and he turned his steps towards it.

It *was* locked, of course. Old Crockett had seen to that. They came to a halt upon the door-step. "What is to be done now?" he said, sinking his voice to a whisper; it seemed by this time as if they were joint conspirators, and equally guilty.

"I must ring, otherwise, how are you to get in?" he added, in a tone of expostulation.

"Oh no, don't; please, please don't ring! There will be such a dreadful fuss. I *do* so hate a fuss!"

The Major sympathised. He too hated a fuss. He abstained from saying that she had brought it upon herself.

"How, then, will you get in?" he enquired.

"Couldn't I creep through one of the windows? They can't all be locked? Or I might climb up one of the water-pipes? I got down one once at Shoreham!" Her tone was now quite amicable, she had apparently accepted him as an ally—one who, as he could not be thrown off, might as well be made available.

He shook his head. "Not possible, I'm afraid," he said gravely. "Besides, I don't think I could arrange it with my conscience to break into your grandmother's house in that fashion. No, there is only one thing

that I can see to be done. If you will promise to stay quietly where you are, I will see if I cannot call Lady Mordaunt without disturbing any one else."

"Grandmamma! But that is as bad as anything! She will tell—everybody!"

"Not if she says she will keep it a secret, and I think she will. Promise me not to stir until I come back?"

"Very well!" she answered gloomily.

He left her and went round to the other, or garden side of the wing, into which Lady Mordaunt's bedroom, he knew, looked. As he expected, there was a light still burning there, and he could see her shadow moving leisurely to and fro. The window was open a few inches, and, picking up a light handful of sand, he flung it audaciously straight in upon the carpet. There was a stifled exclamation, then a pause. Then, as he expected, Lady Mordaunt herself appeared at the open window.

"Who did that? Who is there?" she enquired angrily.

"Hush! don't call out, please. It is I, John Lawrence."

"John Lawrence! And what in the name of all that's mysterious brings John Lawrence under my windows at this hour of the night, I should like to know?"

"Lady Mordaunt, will you do me a favour? Will you come and speak to me by yourself at the front door?"

"Upon my word! Your audacity, young man, is increasing! Why should I come and speak to you at the front door? Do you wish me to catch my death? Are you sure you are not a little—drunk?"

"Quite sure; not the least. I want you to open the door yourself. There is some one else there, whom I want you to let in."

"To let in! Are you raving? Who can there be to let in at twelve o'clock at night?"

He went closer to the window, and spoke in a whisper. "Your grand-daughter is out there," he said.

"My *grand*-daughter! My *grand*-daugh-

ter out of doors at this hour? Really you *must* be drunk!"

In spite of this assurance, he heard her moving hastily to and fro in the room; a minute afterwards a light shone in the window of the passage. He went hastily back to the front door.

Elly was still there, leaning against the balustrade which led to the entrance. She looked like a little white wraith in the moonlight. Lady Mordaunt's steps were heard approaching. Both conspirators trembled. Suddenly the door was flung open, and the light of the candle rushed out across the gravel in a long red line, their two shadows dancing fantastically along with it.

Lady Mordaunt stood silent for a moment, gazing at them.

"Upon my word!" she ejaculated at last. "Perhaps you will have the goodness both of you to explain the meaning of all this?"

"The meaning is that your grand-

daughter could not sleep, so she went out for a walk in the garden, and the evening being so lovely, she forgot how late it was getting. Now she wishes to get to her own room without disturbing any one, and we are sure that you will be good enough to help us. That's all. It's perfectly simple, you see!"

"So it appears! And what part, pray, have you had in the drama, young man? Was it *you* who induced her to go out?"

"Not that exactly. I merely met her when she had got out."

"It wasn't his fault a bit, grandmamma! He had nothing to say to it," the girl said impatiently. "I went out of my own accord."

"Indeed. And why, pray?"

"I couldn't sleep, I—everything was so horrid—I couldn't *bear* staying where I was."

"What prevented you from sleeping?"

"I don't know, I—I—I." Her face quivered piteously, and she let it fall sud-

denly into her hands with a childish gesture. "I—I missed—Matty so. She—she always came to say good night to me. There was no one to say good night to me." This was followed by a long sob, which went to the hearts of both hearers.

Lady Mordaunt and the Major exchanged glances.

"She's worn out, poor little thing!" he said *sotto voce*. "Don't scold her any more to-night, there's a dear lady."

"Scolding! I am *not* scolding her, I was not *thinking* of scolding her!" she retorted angrily. "Come in, child, and we'll see if we can't get you to bed without disturbing the rest of the good people," she added gently.

Elly obeyed, but tired out with tears and sleepiness she stumbled over the threshold. Her grandmother put her arm tenderly round her to support her. It was the touch of the feather to the jar of alum. The child broke down utterly; clinging to her, and hiding her head upon her shoulder, sobbing

as if her very soul was flooding away upon the torrent of her tears.

The old lady stooped and kissed her tenderly; stroking her head, and smoothing down the long tangles of her hair. Suddenly an idea seemed to strike her, for she turned round sharply upon the bystander. "Good night, John Lawrence," she said tartly over her shoulder. Whereupon the Major stole meekly away, shutting the door behind him with a cautiousness which even the discreet Crockett could hardly have outdone!

CHAPTER VII.

He did not go again to Mordaunt for several weeks. His work had got into knots and tangles, and he meant to devote himself religiously to it henceforward, and brook no more interruptions. He received a note from Lady Mordaunt a few days later, asking him to dinner, but hardened his heart, and sent a plump refusal. He would have been delighted to go, he assured her, if it were possible, but really he could *not* leave his work.

He heard no more for some time, and began to wonder whether she was offended. At last another note arrived, which showed that her displeasure was not, at any rate, implacable.

It was scarcely gratifying, she said, that a person whose society you enjoyed told you plainly that he preferred that of dead crabs and disgusting gelatinous monsters. There *was* a time, she could assure him, when the most repulsive of jelly-fishes or sea-anemones would not have kept a young man from her side. Well, well, that time was gone by, and only fools refused to recognize the inevitable. Her son and daughter-in-law, she went on to inform him, were leaving her in the course of a few days for Homburg, in order to try the effect of the waters upon Lord Helversdale's gout. Her grand-daughter Elly, on the other hand, was remaining with her, an arrangement for which she had entirely to thank *him*, John Lawrence. But for his extraordinary and unprecedented interference the other night, she would as soon have thought of keeping a kangaroo or cat-of-the-mountains from the Zoological Gardens under her charge, as that young woman. This being the case, she hoped that he would understand that

the responsibility was, at least in part, *his;* that he would have the goodness to remember that she looked to him to assist her in the management of that excessively troublesome specimen of humanity! She herself, she observed, had come to a time of life when *peace* was what you chiefly demanded of Providence, your relatives, and the world at large. However it might be with a man, at sixty-two a woman's work was, or ought in her opinion, to be over. You have done your best—well, badly, indifferently, as the case might be, but still your best. After that, the game is done; the book closed. Whether you lived or died, *finis* ought to be written to it. You ought to be exempt; exempt from having to begin life over again from the beginning; from having to run about in pursuit of nursery maids and governesses; from having to see that children avoided catching coughs and colds; that they turned their toes the right way, and spoke with the proper accents. Above all, exempt

from having your nerves upset, and your good digestion utterly deranged by the proceedings of a little rampageous two-legged catamount, who appeared to exude mischief as naturally as a pine-tree exudes turpentine!

The Major laughed a good deal over this letter, which seemed to him eminently characteristic—though he had never known Lady Mordaunt flaunt her own incapacities with quite so much vigour before. As to her statement that she expected him to be responsible for her grand-daughter's conduct, he took that to be merely a hyperbolical way of saying that he was to come to Mordaunt as often as possible, and discounted accordingly. He wrote to tell her that he was starting in a day or two for London on business, so could not present himself at present, but would do so the instant he returned.

His letters to Professor Jenkyll had, so far, elicited few replies, and those neither particularly apposite nor particularly satis-

factory. Probably he was unusually busy, the Major reflected. Still, let him be ever so busy, if once he was made to understand the real importance and novelty of the suggestions made to him, he would certainly lay all other work aside in order to follow them up. This being the case, the only thing was to take him by storm, and accordingly he started a few days later for London, with all his facts and bottles set out in battle array.

He found his friend—a huge leonine man, with an enormous beard—in a whirl of hurry and excitement, excitement not entirely due to the interests of science. He was just starting upon a visit to a country house, a very illustrious country house, where Cabinet Ministers and ambassadors were quite average guests. The Professor, for all his philosophy, was evidently a little caught in this ministerial and ambassadorial vortex. His talk ran upon high social and political topics; the extraordinary blunders of the Ministry; the private opinions of the

Duke—that Duke to whose house he was going—upon the present complicated and ticklish state of foreign affairs. It was not without some difficulty that the Major brought the conversation round to that humbler subject which at the moment was engrossing his own thoughts.

"Ah, yes, those theories of yours, my dear fellow, about the medusoid form of the Tubulariæ!" the Professor exclaimed. "Read your letters? Why of course I read your letters! Very ingenious and suggestive they were too, upon my word, very. No doubt the whole arrangement is more or less in a chaotic state. About your views—it struck me, you know, that there were a few—well, flaws. Your terminology is—you'll excuse my saying so—a little mixed. Of course, it is a great difficulty, especially in that order, which really ought to be set up with a glossary of its own. I could put you right in ten minutes if I had time, but I have been so run off my feet lately that really I—I have your letters all

safe though. Perhaps you'd like to have them back, eh?"

The Major looked blank. "I hoped that you might have been able to go into the matter with me, Jenkyll," he said in a tone of disappointment. "Surely the point is worth clearing up, and as to the proofs, I have them here." He held up a small box, from whence proceeded a clinking sound of bottles.

The Professor scratched his chin and eyed the box with some disfavour. "It's a deuced pity you didn't take up the subject last year," he said rather testily. "Yes, I know, you couldn't, you were in India; still, it was a pity. You see I was working at the order myself then, and I could have put you right in a twinkling—had the whole thing at my fingers' ends—pat, like my A B C! You would have been uncommonly useful to me too—really you would! It's a great matter having some one going over the same set of facts as oneself, we're all liable to error. These ideas of yours

might have come in then in their proper place, and I should have been able to say whether they were any good or not—worth anything, you know. Now I don't candidly see, my dear fellow, that I can be of any use to you. I make a point of sweeping my mind as much as possible of all old work before plunging into anything new. It's like a language; one turns the other out. Of course, after a bit, I could rub it up again, but if I did there would be a danger of the rest going to the dogs."

John Lawrence looked blanker still. The Professor made frantic clutches at his papers, and stuffed them away into a succession of pigeon-holes before him.

"I'll tell you what to do," he exclaimed, turning round. "Go to the Museum, to Jones—Perkington Jones—explain your ideas to him, and see what he says. He's a painstaking little fellow, just the man for you; limited, of course—frightened out of his wits at a new idea. Still, that will be

all the better. If you can convince him you can convince any one. You can't do better than go to Jones; tell him *I* sent you. And now, my dear fellow, I must be off. Time and tide, you know——. The Duke is the most punctual man in England. You'll forgive me?" And the Professor was gone in a whirlwind!

The Major took his advice, and went to Mr. Perkington Jones, whom he found seated at a large table in one of the private apartments belonging to the Natural History collection, not then removed to more spacious quarters. Mr. Perkington Jones was small, neat, and dapper. He wore a flower in his buttonhole, and neatly stitched alpaca sleeves to keep his cuffs clean. He listened to our friend's explanation with the air of a pedagogue confronted with some full-grown but unusually backward pupil. Though young, he had evidently all a scientist's confirmed distrust of amateurs and their fads.

When his visitor paused, he enquired

if he had read Professor Kettleworth's monograph upon the subject.

The Major had done so.

"And Cox's 'Campanularia Atlantica'?"

This also the Major had read.

"And Heimann's papers in the 'Monatsbericht der Akademie der Wissenschaft'?"

No, Major Lawrence replied, he had not read those; he did not know German.

Mr. Jones looked as if that settled the question. Scientific men, he observed, with an emphasis on the first word, were obliged to acquaint themselves with the latest results of investigation, foreign no less than English. Of course, amateurs were under no such obligation. Nothing was easier, as Mr.—thank you—Major Lawrence would no doubt admit, than to be misled by erroneous appearances. Every competent biologist knew that they cropped up by hundreds under his hands. Gentlemen whose training had been—well, not of a rigorously scientific character—were peculiarly prone to be—er—to be led away by

their imaginations. He was far from saying that this was the case in the present instance; still, Mr.—thank you—Major Lawrence must admit that, it was, to say the least, probable.

That undisciplined observer's stock of patience was beginning to wax thin under these repeated rebuffs. It was not a question of appearances or imagination, but of *proofs*, he said curtly. All he asked was that some one would have the goodness to go over the *facts* with him, and see if their impressions corroborated his. The facts were there, he had them in a box by his side. There was no need to refer to Heimann or any one else. The whole thing lay in a nutshell!

Mr. Jones opened his eyes mildly. It was the nature of amateurs, he was aware, to lose their tempers and become violent, whenever their hobbies were crossed. A great many erroneous conceptions, he observed, *would* be found corrected in Heimann's papers. If Mr.—thank you—Major

Lawrence proposed to go on pursuing these studies, he was sure that he would find it to be quite worth his while to acquire the——

But the Major hastily gathered up his box of bottles and took his leave. He felt that if he remained much longer, the irascibility of amateurs might possibly be displayed in even more convincing fashion.

At his club that evening he encountered a friend to whom, as a probable sympathiser, he recounted his grievances. The friend was a mighty Nimrod, mighty traveller, mighty naturalist too, in his way. Had shot, fished, hunted, zoologized, in nearly every quarter of the globe and was reported to know more about one particular order of mammals than any man living, with the possible exception of a single Leipsic professor who had never been outside his own university town. As a sample of the self-trained and self-educated amateur, he was, however, to some degree tarred with the

same brush as John Lawrence. The faculty looked doubtfully upon both.

"There's nothing for it, my dear fellow, take my word, but a plunge into print," that experienced veteran declared positively. "State your facts as clearly as you can. Then when some one attacks you—as of course some one will—and proves that there never was so incompetent a nincompoop, you fire straight back, which will give you an opportunity of stating your case over again and bringing up every proof you have, and sooner or later one of the big wigs will take it up, and the point will be settled one way or other. If you're wrong, they'll not let you be in any doubt about it; if you're right, some one will find that he held it himself from the beginning. It won't be very satisfactory anyhow, still that's what you'll do, if you take my advice."

The Major thanked him, but looked doubtful. He did not, somehow relish the programme. He had a vision of a great many hard words—not exclusively in dog-

Latin—which affected him unpleasantly even in anticipation. Sitting up rather disconsolately that evening he thought over his friend's advice, and the more he thought of it the less he liked it. That his facts were in the main right he felt convinced, but that his own technical equipment was equal to supporting them, was a very different affair. If Jenkyll or any other biological luminary would have looked into the matter and pronounced upon it, then he would have felt safe. As it was, would it not be better, he asked himself ruefully, to leave the whole question alone for the present? After all, he reflected, as he got up and lit a bedroom-candle, if he *was* right some better qualified observer would no doubt hit upon the same idea sooner or later, and if wrong, the sooner his blunders were dropped and forgotten the better! This, it will be owned, was philosophic, but the philosophy even of an amateur naturalist is subject to lapses, and next morning he found himself eyeing his

unfortunate box of bottles with a sense of disgust, a cold discomfort and inward self-derision, not far removed from incipient nausea. Other variations of baffled aspirations have before now produced the same pangs!

BOOK II.

THE YOUNG IDEA.

CHAPTER I.

The day after his return to Devonshire he walked over to Mordaunt to see his old friend. Upon approaching the hall door he perceived that it had again assumed that appearance of fixed inhospitality which it had worn before the coming of the Helversdales, so turned away, not without a feeling of satisfaction, to the other, known as the jib door, the same to which he and Elly had gone upon the night of their adventure, and which gave entrance, as the reader will remember, to the wing.

Some fresh wheel-marks upon the gravel seemed to portend a visitor, and in effect upon entering the sitting-room he found Lady Mordaunt entertaining a stout lady

in green velvet with a great many ostrich feathers upon her head. The day was bright and summer-like, and the lady's green velvet had a very sumptuous appearance, as if it had been assumed for the first time. The Major recognized her at once. It was the same lady they had met in a barouche the morning Lady Mordaunt had come to announce the Helversdales' arrival, and who had been mentioned to him as Mrs. Cathers. He glanced round the room for her son, but there was no one else visible.

His old friend received him with all her usual kindliness, more even, he fancied, than usual. She had missed him atrociously, she assured him. If he had kept away for the purpose of making himself of value, his vanity ought to be punished, but she was afraid that it would not be her hand that could administer the chastisement. Everything, he must remember, was comparative, and he was literally the only man under sixty or over sixteen within a radius of a dozen miles! He inquired, as in duty

bound, after her son and daughter-in-law, and learnt that they had quitted her the preceding Tuesday. They were to remain a few nights in London and then to proceed to Germany, where it was expected that they would stay at least a couple of months. As she had already informed him in her letter, her grand-daughter had remained, and was at that moment in the park with Mrs. Cathers' son, who had ridden over upon his pony.

"And I sincerely hope he will not let himself be drawn into any madcap pranks by her," she went on, addressing that lady. "The child doesn't seem to know what fear is. She makes me shake in my shoes from morning till night. Literally, from hour to hour, I never know what new piece of foolhardiness I may have to hear of.

Mrs. Cathers looked alarmed, but responded with some motherly pride that Algernon was a most accomplished horseman. She had had a riding-master for some months on purpose to give him in-

struction, and he assured her that there was nothing left for him to learn.

"Ah, well, that is all right. I don't imagine that Elly is an accomplished horse-woman, or a horse-woman at all, only if a hippogriffin, or a dragon with a fiery tail could be found and presented her to ride, she would mount it without a moment's hesitation!"

Curious to renew his acquaintance with this inconvenient little phenomenon, Major Lawrence suggested that he should go to the park and see what the riders were about, to which Lady Mordaunt agreed, desiring him, however, to order them to return at once. Mrs. Cathers had asked for her carriage.

He had not gone far before he perceived them. About the middle of the park, forming a circle around a dilapidated thorn-tree, lay a well-defined ring of dull brown, left on the grass by the hoofs of horses. This circle was known as the racecourse, and in former years had been used as an

exercise ground, until a closer intimacy with the inner penetralia of the Turf had caused a concentration of all Lord Helversdale's stable establishment in the vicinity of Newmarket. As the Major was leisurely walking across the soft springy turf he perceived three figures on horseback; a larger one, that of a groom; two smaller ones, that of a boy and a girl, standing together upon the deserted racecourse.

It was evident, even before he was within hearing distance, that an altercation was going on between the two latter; the girl urging, the boy resisting some suggestion, that suggestion from their gestures being apparently the leaping of one of the fences which crossed this space at tolerably regular intervals; fences which, with their high furze-topped banks, presented somewhat alarming possibilities to an inexpert rider. At last the girl's persistence seemed to overcome the boy's reluctance, for they started off together at a brisk canter towards the obstacle in question.

Seeing they were coming towards him, the Major stood still. It was a pretty sight. Mounted upon a rough Exmoor pony, which usually did duty as a post-carrier, a grey skirt below her black jacket, a small grey felt hat on her head, Elly Mordaunt looked as if she had just sprung accidentally into the saddle. Her hair, loosened by her rapid movements, lay in a brown tangle on her shoulders, her eyes shone and danced as she urged her pony forward. Her companion's appearance was much more correct. He wore a well-fitting riding suit, with a pair of corded leggings like a man's; his pony's coat, too, shone from excess of grooming. These more orthodox accessories did not appear to impart much confidence. His big black eyes were fixed upon the impediment in front of them with an air of anything but satisfaction. Even from where he stood, the Major could see that his lips twitched nervously.

Both riders came down at a quick pace towards the fence, the boy slightly leading.

His pony, a handsome bright bay, nearly thoroughbred, with black mane and tail, was evidently full of going and keen for the effort. Elly on the contrary, had some difficulty in keeping her animal's head to the fence. Every moment it showed symptoms of swerving, and it was only by sheer determination on the rider's part that it was kept straight. Both had their front hoofs nearly upon the brink, when young Cathers' courage suddenly gave way completely. With both hands he clutched at the reins, and with a violent wrench, which nearly brought it upon its haunches, twisted the pony's head away from the fence, and forced it to turn aside along the flattened top of the bank. At the same time the Exmoor pony seemed to collect all its energies for the effort; made a bound in the air, which brought it several feet beyond the necessary distance, to the evident astonishment of its rider, whose attention was so taken up by her own efforts to retain her seat as to be

unable to observe what had befallen her companion.

As soon as she was again firm in the saddle, she turned and looked back with an air of surprise.

"Well? What happened? Why didn't you come on?" she asked.

"The brute refused," he responded promptly; "I couldn't get him to go." By way probably of proving his assertion he struck the pony a cut with his riding-whip, to which it responded by a plunge which nearly had the effect of sending its rider into the middle of a clump of furze.

"Upon my word, you're a nice unblushing little liar!" was the Major's inward comment. He did not feel justified in repeating the observation aloud, so merely walked on towards the two riders.

"How do you do, Lady Elly? and well done!" he said good-naturedly. "You came over that fence like a little grey bird."

"Very nearly flew off like a little bird,

didn't I?" she answered with a laugh. "Did you see? I hoped nobody did." Then a recollection of their last encounter seemed to come over her, for she grew red up to the brim of her hat.

The Major perceived the blush, and guessed the cause, but took no notice.

"You kept his head well to the fence, at any rate," he said. "He had all the mind to refuse, if you would have let him."

"I suppose they don't like being asked to do things for nothing, do they?" she answered, patting her beast's mane, which was tangled like a brier fence. "The other pony did refuse."

"Oh it did, did it?"

By this time young Cathers had come up, having made the circuit of the fence, which ended a little below where the two riders had so abruptly parted company. He was evidently on anything but good terms with his pony. He looked, moreover, sullen and rather shamefaced. His beauty, however, was incontestable.

"Should you like to try it again?" Elly enquired unsuspiciously. "Perhaps your pony wouldn't refuse next time."

"Oh yes it would," he answered hastily. "I know it would, it always does. It is a nasty brute. I have another a much larger one at home. When I come next I will ride that."

"It is not considered a good plan to chuck your bridle upon the very edge of a fence!" the Major could not resist observing with some significance.

The boy scowled at him, half fiercely, half with an air of apprehension, his great black eyes growing thunderous with hostility.

"Come along," he said sulkily, in a whisper to Elly. "Don't let him keep you bothering there all night."

John caught the look and the whisper. Decidedly he did not like that boy!

"When are we going to have our next walk together, Lady Elly?" he said, laying a detaining hand upon the mane of the

Exmoor pony. "You must come and see my cottage. You said you liked queer beasts, and I have no end of them."

Elly's eyes brightened. Oh, I *should* so like to go!" she said. "Have you got a trilobite? I have been wanting for years and years—all my life—to see a trilobite."

"Perhaps I have; not alive though; there aren't any trilobites alive, except perhaps in very deep water. They're all fossils—stones, you know."

"Oh," she said, with an air of disappointment, "I didn't know. I thought they were alive."

"But I have sea-urchins, and starfish, and sea mice, and more moths and butterflies than you probably ever saw in your life," the Major went on encouragingly.

"Do come," Algernon Cathers whispered irritably. "What an old bore he is! *Can't* you get away from him?"

"By the way, I was sent to tell you both that it was time to come in," John continued,

turning with a suddenness which made the last speaker start. "Lady Mordaunt is anxious to see that no one has broken any bones, and your mother," nodding at young Cathers, "is going, I believe."

The person addressed made no answer, beyond another scowl.

Elly looked disappointed. "Dear me, what a pity! we might have had another gallop," she said, in a tone of regret. "Do you think your mother really wants to go?"

"She won't want to go till *I'm* ready," he answered with lordly decision. As he spoke, however, he watched the Major from under his black lashes, and moved his pony a few paces away with an air of apprehension.

Elly looked doubtfully from one to the other, as if uncertain whose opinion to go by. The matter was decided by the Exmoor, who, seeing his companion move away, started at a trot to follow him. His rider yielded, and the two children presently

cantered off across the grass, the groom in his yellow belt thundering in their rear. When she had got half-way across the open space the girl looked back to where the Major was still standing, and waved her hand to him with an air of remorse.

CHAPTER II.

After the other guests had left, John Lawrence sat a long while with Lady Mordaunt. He had twice taken up his hat to go, but each time she desired him peremptorily to put it down again, and he had obeyed. There was a charm about the room, about the whole atmosphere of Mordaunt, of which he had never before been so sensible. Here, if any spot in the world, he said to himself, was home. He sat down therefore in his arm-chair with an air of contentment, while she moved about, sticking bunches of flowers into a row of big Nankin pots set at intervals along the window-ledge.

"As you are so silent I suppose you are

waiting for me to apologize to you?" she suddenly observed, turning round upon him, her blue eyes lit with whimsical light.

He opened his. "To apologize? About anything in particular?" he enquired.

"About that child—Elly. You perceive that I have adopted your view of her instead of my own. Naturally, therefore, you triumph!"

"I have not had time to perceive anything yet," he answered smiling.

"You perceive that she is still here?"

"Well, yes. I perceive that."

"And you are aware that her being so is your doing?"

"I was not, indeed."

"It is then. Until that evening when you caught her and brought her in, I had as much idea of proposing to have a young cameleopard left under my charge as her."

"Yet it seems to me a very natural arrangement."

"It may seem natural to you, young man, but to me it seems anything but

natural! Every morning when I wake up I wonder at my own folly. Remember, if you please, that I am sixty-two, that I have never flattered myself that I am particularly fond of children, that I am, as it happens, particularly fond of being left at peace, and not having my daily life interfered with. Peace and her own way, are, as I have already told you, the two possessions that a woman of my age craves, and which she has a right, I hold, to insist upon!"

"And who hinders you, you unreasonable woman, from being at peace?" he replied laughing.

"You do, John Lawrence! and that child does!"

"Upon my word, Lady Mordaunt, this is too much! How in the name of reason do *I* interfere with you?"

"You won't leave me alone. You bring little long-legged torments upon me—at one o'clock in the morning! You come between me and all my selfish creature comforts!"

"I never learnt so much about your

selfishness before," he answered. "Do you know, I was rather under the impression that you were less selfish, on the whole, than other people!"

"Because I have wit enough to throw a veil about it? Because I give employment to a few wretched old creatures who would be much better off in the workhouse? Believe me, that has nothing to do with it. To give money—if you are lucky enough to have any to give—that is the least of taxes. To give up one's time, one's ways, the habits that have come to be like one's own bones—that, if you like, is generosity—a form to which, as it happens, I have a particular objection, and which, I foresee, it will be my privilege to exercise, if this child is to remain here permanently."

"Permanently? I thought it was for a month or two?"

"So it is, but it by no means follows that it may not extend to much longer if I show the smallest inclination to keep her. However she and I may get on, there is no

question that she and her mother do not get on at all. It is hardly a compliment to your intelligence to tell you such a very open family secret as that. Probably they will go on living abroad till things settle themselves. They will live in towns, and you may imagine how this child, with her tastes of a hawk or a Red Indian, would get on in a town! In short, I see a vista of interminable grandmothering before me, and it is all owing, John Lawrence, to you."

He tried to look penitent. "I am very sorry," he said; "and yet, upon second thoughts, I don't know why I should be. It's a great piece of luck for your grandchild."

"All very fine, but how about her grandmother?"

"For you too, possibly!"

"You are very good to suppose so! Meantime you have brought it upon me, and I expect you to help me. And first and foremost, shall I get another governess for her?"

He began to laugh afresh. "Upon my word, you pay my masculine incompetency a great deal more compliment than it is entitled to," he said. "How on earth can I tell? Surely her mother is the proper person to consult?"

"Nothing of the sort," Lady Mordaunt answered tartly. "Her mother is the last person I intend to consult. She has chosen to fling her authority into my hands, and as long as she leaves it there, I shall keep it. To have a half and half authority is what I never would put up with, and so I told them both plainly. They can take away the child to-morrow—so much the better—but as long as she is here I act as I choose, without consulting anybody!"

"Then why consult me?"

"I consult you because you *are* nobody. I can hear what you have to say, and follow my own inclinations all the same."

He laughed again. "Your candour does you honour. Many people act upon that principle, but few avow it so frankly."

"Well, you see I do. Meanwhile you have not answered. Do you or do you not think she would be better under a governess?"

Thus appealed to, he endeavoured conscientiously to bring his masculine incompetency to bear upon the point.

"You don't think of having that little Mademoiselle—what's-her name—back, do you?" he enquired.

"No, I don't. If she had remained, I should not have sent her away, because she and the child were fond of one another; because, upon the whole, I believe she was a decent and well-intentioned little idiot. As the deed has been done, however, I shall leave it so. There is a degree of imbecility that is little short of criminal, and so far as I could observe, she had attained that point. On the other hand, the idea of looking out for another governess, with every imaginary qualification, compatible and incompatible, is one that I detest. The unfortunate young woman would be

bored to death, and I should be bored to death with having her. She would have either to take to writing romances with me for the female villain, or else to elope with the gardener."

"Under these distressing circumstances why have a governess at all?"

"What is the alternative? Is that child to grow up a sort of assistant gamekeeper or extra stable boy? Is she to break her legs over stone walls, or her neck climbing trees? Is she to—how can I tell? Her imagination, you may be sure, is equal to inventing many more perils for herself than I can think of at this moment."

The Major frowned reflectively. "Give her a tutor!" he exclaimed with an air of discovery.

"A tutor! Are you dreaming? What tutor could I possibly find here? Unless, by the way, you mean yourself? If so, I have no objection."

He laughed outright. "I might teach her something about the ways of an octopus,

or the common practice of field artillery. There, I am afraid, my instructions would stop!"

"What do you mean then? Who is she to have?"

"Well, I was thinking at the moment of Mr. Bagehot. He seems a well-informed fellow, and has a good deal of spare time upon his hands. Of course, it is only an idea."

Lady Mordaunt looked up. "Do you know it is not such a bad one," she said musingly. "It might do. Not, of course, permanently, but for a while; it would ward off the evil day. He is not by way of being a gentleman, is he?"

"I suppose not. He is not an ordinary village schoolmaster though. We have had some talks, and he seemed to me an intelligent man. He is waiting here until something better turns up."

"*Tant mieux!* He would teach her some of those vulgar fundamentals of which young ladies now-a-days are so profoundly ignorant,

and he would not expect me to ask him to luncheon."

"No, he would not expect that."

"Then so be it. You pass his house on your way back. Ask him to call to-morrow morning and see me."

"You really think the idea worth a trial? Don't blame me, though you know, if it turns out a failure!"

"Oh, it is too late for that, my friend! You have got the responsibility, and you must keep it!"

So in fact it was settled. Mr. Bagehot showed every disposition to do what was required of him. He was a young man upon his promotion, and this seemed as good a way of forwarding it as any other. Sometimes when he thought about the matter at all, the Major could not resist a certain whimsical dismay over the reflection that he had thrust himself into the position of referee and final arbiter upon the destinies of a young lady's education—he who had so prudently resolved to have

nothing to say to these Helversdales and their troublesome affairs! He did not repeat that resolution with any very fervent determination after this date. Indeed, as the days went on, he found himself slipping more and more into the position of son, brother, uncle—male relative generally—to the two ladies, the old and the young one. He never slept at Mordaunt, but it may safely be said that not a day passed without a meeting. If by any chance he failed to put in an appearance a message would come to him from his old friend entreating that he would not fail them. Did he propose deserting them before his time? Did he remember how short that time was?

As often as not Elly Mordaunt herself was the messenger upon these occasions. She grew to be as much at home upon Colt's Head as himself, and had the contents of his milk-pans by heart, and utterly won the heart of Phil Judd by insisting upon his taking her out fishing with him in the *Arethusa*, even inducing the Major to for-

swear his dredging in favour of the more legitimate craft, a feat which his recent discomfiture rendered less difficult than it would probably have been a few weeks earlier.

More and more, as the summer passed on, it grew to be a matter of course that she should be consigned to him whenever Mr. Bagehot's lessons were over, and Lady Mordaunt was not disposed to stir from her arm-chair. At first he yielded merely from good-nature. It was not long, however, before she had established her own footing in his affections, while she on her side made no secret of her preference for his society over that of all her other new surroundings.

Though not a clever, she was an original child; fresh and spontaneous. Her ideas were her own, not imbibed, not at all disposed to give way upon compulsion. There were contradictory elements about her, too, which kept observation alive, and which it amused him to draw out. For instance,

with all a boy's love of sports, she had none of a boy's callousness in such matters. Like most children who have led at once a lonely and an open-air life, the earth and its swimming, creeping, flying inmates were much more to her, more real, more individualized, than to others. The birds, and their comings and goings; the creatures in the ditches or under the bark of trees; the domestic arrangements of the frogs, the lady-birds, the Daddy long-legs—all these were matters of vital and thrilling import. John himself—by virtue, perhaps, of his craft as a naturalist—retained a good deal of this child's gift of curiosity still unperverted and unspoilt. For him, too, the lids were not all shut down and padlocked, or the out-of-door world wholly peaked, barren, and shorn of glamour. That interminable Georgic in innumerable cantos which Nature is never tired of writing, and some few amongst her sons never weary of reading, had always been more or less open to him. In point of imagination Elly had perhaps

less by nature than her big companion, but then she was a child still, and therefore by royal prerogative much more than his equal.

There were plenty of points in which they did not agree, points, too, in which her very warm-heartedness promised to be a source of serious discord. Like most old-fashioned properties where new lights have never broken, a good deal of matter-of-course cruelty was carried on at Mordaunt, not of course labelled as such—classed under the various heads of trapping, ferreting, and so forth, as much a matter of every-day occurrence as the weeding out of weakly shoots in the plantations. Into all these time-honoured abuses the newly arrived grand-daughter plunged her young blade with the energy of a crusader. Between her and the gamekeeper—a veteran with a scarred face, the record of a long past poaching affray—there raged for weeks and months an internecine war, sometimes attaining dimensions which threatened to set the whole property by the ears.

Appealed to by both combatants, Lady Mordaunt found more difficulty in coming to a decision than often happened to her essentially incisive intelligence. Upon the one hand there was the instinct of conservatism, the objection to innovation in any form or for any cause, upon the other hand there was Elly, bursting in open-mouthed with the chronicle of some new horror she had unearthed; some atrocity that demanded instant redress; some rabbit caught in a trap; some cat hung *in terrorem;* some poison treacherously administered in food; some innocent unrighteously done to death—an advocate by no means easy to put down, one too, who, even when silenced, remained nearly as eloquent as before.

In all these emergencies Major Lawrence was the person appealed to, and the acknowledged referee. Upon this question of killing, however, Elly took high ground, not to be satisfied or set aside even by his interposition. Why *should* they be killed?

What *right* had men to ill-use and kill creatures for their pleasure? she would ask with flaming cheeks and big, grey angry eyes. What *business* had they to do it? It was cruel, wicked, tyrannical! They ought to be put in prison for it.

Whereat he would do his best to expound the rights of the case so far as he himself understood them. Death, tyranny—the suppression of the weak, the supremacy of the strong—these were not man's invention, he told her, on the contrary, were in the world long before he set foot on it. It was the law of the thing called Life—an ugly law, if you will—a very ugly law, in fact, but still a universal one, and as such incontestable. It was not an explanation which particularly satisfied its exponent, and it need hardly be said, therefore, that it did not satisfy Elly.

"Then you mean to say!—you mean to say!—you mean to say!" she would cry, her hair streaming back, her great grey eyes seeming to grow larger and larger as

their wont was. "You mean to say that if you saw me set upon by a big boy—a very big boy—twice as big as me, and he were to knock me down or ill-use me for nothing, when I was doing no harm! You mean to say that you would stand by and say: 'Oh, it's all right! He is the strongest, and therefore he can do as he likes!' You mean to say you would say *that*, Major Lawrence?"

"Well no, I don't suppose I should quite say that, Elly," he would answer. "But then, you see, I should probably be stronger still, at least I hope so. And I should just take that big boy by the scruff of his neck, and shake him within an inch of his life. And then I should put him right down there in front of you, and make him beg your pardon, and keep him there till he did. That's what *I* should do."

"Oh but that has *nothing* to say to it! that's no argument at *all!* You know very well it isn't!" she would cry indignantly. "It's not whether you're stronger or not,

it is the *right* I'm talking of! His being stronger than me has nothing to say to his having the *right* to bully me, and I'd say the same if he were to cut me into little pieces for saying it! And it's *just* the same about us and the rabbits! I don't believe we have one bit of right to kill them, and catch them in horrible cruel traps, just because we're the strongest! It's nothing but cowardice and—and—wickedness on our part! I think we're a horrid, wicked, cruel, cowardly set, and deserve *anything* for it. You may laugh as much as you like, but I *do*, Major Lawrence, and you'll never, never make me say I *don't*."

The Major did laugh, but all the same he half agreed with Elly. Her instincts, like those of others of her sex, were better, he thought, than her arguments.

"Don't eat any rabbit-pie next time it comes to table," he would say soothingly. "That will be a comfort to you, I am sure!"

At which she would fume and frown, and

toss her tangled mane and dash away in high dudgeon, refusing to speak to him when she saw him next. Yet they were fast friends, and certainly no summer in his life had ever flown so fast as this one!

CHAPTER III.

Not that he had got over his zoological disasters by any means! On the contrary, the sting of that unsuccessful expedition to London smarted afresh each time his eye rested on any of his apparatus, and that necessarily was every day. Especially that terrible word "amateur" rankled! It was the gist of the whole position, the symbol of his inadequacy to grapple with those problems which Mr. Perkington Jones handled so expertly. There was nothing new in it, it is true. He had called himself an amateur hundreds of times, but that, unhappily, is very different. Are not the most undeniable of truths—we tell each other so, at any rate, every day—the least

amiably received exactly in proportion to their truthfulness? However easily, too, a man may take his own pretensions, the chances are that there comes a point where his vanity, elsewhere invisible, suddenly lifts up a snaky head, not less irritable than the vainest, and this had always been our modest friend's one vulnerable and assailable point.

It was the futility, more even than the failure, that rankled. This discovery of his, which had seemed to himself so brimful of suggestion—fruitful parent, possibly, of other discoveries still unborn—acorn from which might yet spring vast and shadowy forests—how did it strike those other less prejudiced observers, to whom he had submitted it? Not, to say the least of it, in the same light! He tried to comfort himself by remembering that such at its inception had been the fate of many a discovery with whose fame the world had afterwards rang, but this form of consolation hardly, he felt, applied. This poor unappreciated

bantling of his, even if it had come to maturity, only appealed to one small corner of the zoologic world—precisely that corner which had condemned it. No, the case was too plain. He stood confessed as a mere amateur, a *dilettante* who had taken to dredging and collecting as another man might take to playing golf or accumulating postage-stamps, and who, like many another ignoramus, had got hold of an idea which he was incapable of judging upon its own merits, and had endowed with an importance to which it had intrinsically no claim whatsoever. A less comfortable position it would be difficult for a modest and essentially reasonable man to get himself into.

He made an acquaintance about this time which did not lessen the sting of that salutary lesson. Chancing one day to find himself in Pinkerton, the country town whither he had gone, as the reader will remember, to perform Lady Mordaunt's behests, it occurred to him to pay a visit to the local Natural History Museum, which

he had somehow never done before—certainly not since he was a boy.

He found the usual collections of more or less impossibly stuffed birds and beasts, set in every position except the one they were in the habit of assuming when alive; the usual heterogeneous collection of shells and skulls, fossils, and sprawling alligators; the usual rows of phials in which it was almost impossible to make out any of the contents; the usual labels appertaining to nothing in particular. The collection was not up to the modern mark, that was clear; still a museum must be extraordinarily bad in which a man born with the instincts of a naturalist, and the habits of a collector, cannot happily while away an hour.

One of the curators, seeing him absorbed in the contents of a phial, came forward with an air of hospitality. He was a big, shabby-looking man, with unkempt hair, a bad limp, and the generally dusty, uncared-for look of the habitual shunner of society. The Major's heart warmed to him, how-

ever, in an instant. "Thank God," he said to himself, "this was not another Mr. Perkington Jones!"

The two men drifted into talk over the cases. The shabby curator was evidently an enthusiast in his way, though his enthusiasm appeared to have sustained some weathering. They fraternised, as men will over a hobby, however little there may be otherwise between them. Rather to his own surprise, the Major found himself before long retailing his recent discomfiture, and appealing to his companion for sympathy. His new acquaintance was sympathetic enough, but did not express any particular surprise over the incident.

"I suppose you know that the Godby Collection is here?" he said presently.

John Lawrence had never even heard of the Godby Collection. "What is it?" he asked.

"Hydroida—your own subject. Thecaphoræ, I take it chiefly—Sertularians, and such like. I'm not much in that line

myself. I'm an Entomologist, and a Conchologist, and an Echinodermist, and a bit of a Polyzoist, and about enough too, I can tell you! All the invertebrates come more or less to my share. Old Godby was quite a specialist though; not a trained man; picked it up by himself. I believe he knew more about the order than any one in England; at any rate, in these parts. If you care to see the collection, I'll show it you in a moment. I'm always laying out a day to go over it, and get it into order, only somehow the day never comes."

He had hobbled over to a hook in the wall while he was speaking, from which he took down a bunch of keys, then with a jerk of the head, to indicate that John was to follow, led the way into the next room.

Here the space along the walls was chiefly filled with cabinets. Up to one of these the curator hobbled and unlocked it. The opening revealed a perfect chaos of specimens, which to an uninitiated eye would have appeared to be seaweeds, crowded for

the most part one on top of another, the paper upon which they had been mounted soiled, yellow, and torn with age, the writing half obliterated with time and indifferent usage.

The shabby curator took up one of these, the first that came to hand, and turned the corners down, flattening out the specimen with a finger and thumb, which, big as they were, evidently possessed that sense of touch which is the heritage of the born zoologist.

"Old Godby was forty-five years making it, I believe," he said, pointing with a disengaged finger to the heap. "A fellow who knew him at Tenby told me it was his ruin. He was a surgeon, and at one time in decent practice. He paid no heed to it though. Left his patients to take care of themselves; spent his whole days upon the shore; had to sell his practice; got crippled with rheumatism; parted bit by bit with every stick of furniture he possessed; always stuck to his collection, though,—was adding to it

up to the day of his death. When he died, left it to this museum on condition that it should be known as the Godby Collection! Poor old chap! I suppose he thought that he had secured a sort of posthumous immortality." The curator stopped, and began licking a piece of delicate brown lacework, fastening it down to the paper like a postage-stamp with his thumb. "That was seventeen years ago, and, to the best of my belief, you are the first person that has looked at it since!" he added.

"I can't say much for the state it is in!" the Major said with some indignation, as he explored the pile in a vain attempt to discover a key to the labyrinth. "It is no great encouragement, I must say, to people to make over their things to the public!" he continued with an energy which was not wholly impersonal, for he, too, had collections, which he, too, had destined for some such ungrateful bourne!

The curator shrugged his shoulders. "What would you have? There are only

three of us here, and there are rooms full of unsorted specimens. Every one who has gone in for a collection, ends in sending it to a place of this sort, or leaving it to it in his will. My predecessor did go over it once, I believe, but I don't know that he did it much good. It got knocked about a bit too, when they were doing something to the building."

John was not attending. He was turning over the heap with an air of discouragement. "You have not got any of them in spirits, have you?" he asked.

"I think not—I never heard of any. We had a young shaver here though for a time who made awful havoc amongst the bottles. One day he emptied the spirits of wine out of a heap of them, and filled them up with oxalic acid!—A competitive examination man he was too!" he added with a laugh.

John Lawrence did not echo the laugh. He felt indignant and depressed. Old Godby's forty-five years of wasted labour

rose before him like a nightmare! It was as if he were the inheritor of that guileless investigator's vanished hopes!

"I should have thought *some one* might have found time to go over the collection," he said rather indignantly. "Surely the interest would repay the labour," he added in a tone of protest.

The friendly curator shook his head with an air of deprecation. "I should have said the same thing myself *once*," he said significantly. "But if you were in my shoes you'd soon find the difference. The fact is it is only amateurs like yourself—gentlemen with leisure, who can afford to labour, as you say, for the interest of the thing. Once a man gets into a beaten track, he has to wear blinkers. He couldn't do his own work else!" He shut up the door of the cabinet with a slam which seemed to give point to the last words.

John Lawrence walked away, after a friendly farewell from his new acquaintance, who implored him earnestly to come again,

and see the rest of the collection, assuring him that it was the greatest possible satisfaction to have a talk with a gentleman and an amateur of intelligence like himself. "Except those brats of boys who go field clubbing, there's not a soul in the town who knows an encrinite from a lobster!" he called after him pathetically.

The Major, however, departed without making any very definite promise for the future. The fate of old Godby lay heavy upon his soul! Poor old Godby, who had ruined his career; neglected his practice; thrown over his prospects; sacrificed health, fortune, everything. And for what? For an obscure corner in a third-rate local museum, already groaning under the undesired weight of similar donations. It was not an enticing vista, truly!

The encouragement to research—even when it did not take the more outrageous form of requiring endowment—began to wear to him rather the aspect of the sort of encouragement we extend to those assiduous

collectors, the spiders, who accumulate their wares in the corners of our houses. The instinct must be strong indeed to survive the ordeal!

CHAPTER IV.

And so the summer passed on, faded, and died. And the autumn, too, scattered abroad its treasures, and squandered them upon all sorts of uninteresting, ungrateful places, and now it, too, began to fade, and the poor Major's span of leave was growing smaller and smaller, till it was hardly a hand's-breadth wide. His reluctance to go only seemed to increase as the time went on, and his dependence upon his friends at Mordaunt to grow greater. Lady Mordaunt's friendly scoldings and bright tart sayings never lost their stimulating effect. He used to compare her in his own mind to a handful of sea-thyme, or to the tufts of yellow furze which hung like decorations

over the breasts of his own cliffs, prickly but salutary. As for Elly she had long since won for herself a permanent place in our affectionate warrior's heart.

That small personage's life at Mordaunt was certainly a dull one, and would have been duller still but for his own friendly ministrations. Her grandmother provided everything necessary for her advantage, from brown holland frocks to schoolroom puddings, but it was not to be expected that she could invent new and amusing methods of passing the time, or make herself twelve years old again for her grand-daughter's benefit. It was a neighbourhood, too, all but devoid of any possibilities of neighbourliness. There were no young people within a dozen miles. One old couple—Sir Dolby and Lady de Hautonville—lived in great state, and extreme gloom, in a dreary old manor in the depths of a wood. Another old lady—Mrs. Trotter Tomlinson—childless, and three parts deaf, lived six miles away in the opposite direction. These, with Mrs. Cathers

and her boy, made up the whole range and gamut of social opportunities.

It was owing, perhaps, to this scarcity of playmates that as much intercourse was kept up with the last named as was the case. Usually it was Algernon who came over to Mordaunt, when Elly used to be allowed to don her grey skirt and sally out, and the two children would career about the park under the safe-conduct of the yellow belted groom.

John Lawrence—who had never got over the antipathy with which the fortunate heir of Cathers' Blankets had impressed him—was curious as to what impression Elly had conceived of the boy. To his perception the two were so absolutely antipodal, that it seemed inevitable that the dissimilarity should express itself in the form of a mutual antipathy. Apparently, however, this was not so. What young Cathers' sentiments upon the subject were nobody took the trouble to ascertain, but Elly certainly seemed to like his coming. It rather

scandalized her larger friend that it should be so, and seemed even to him to show a certain want of discrimination, not realizing in his wisdom the need which young tongues have to chatter with young tongues, and young legs to match themselves with others of the same length, let the owners of those legs and tongues be who or what they may.

When not upon his dignity, Algernon Cathers, too, was a bright, clever boy, and an amusing companion, with a store of miscellaneous information picked up from the successive governesses and tutors at high salaries with whom he had been provided. He could play the piano, and sing, he could draw sketches with much rapidity of execution, if less striking correctness, accomplishments which poor Elly, whose education had from various causes not been entirely a success, was conscious of being conspicuously absent in her own person.

This kept their intercourse upon a proper level, and hindered any feeling of superiority from arising upon her part. That

he was no hero in the matter of physical courage she early discovered, but either she condoned the matter, or ignored it, save when some very flagrant case called summarily for notice. She knew that he was delicate, that his lungs were weak, that he had bad colds in the winter, and no doubt all this threw a certain pitying gloss over his short-comings. He had the wit, too, to assume in their intercourse a general air of intellectual superiority, of a ripened acquaintanceship with life and things in general, to which she submitted, as children and young people, who are independent to the verge of insubordination with their elders, often do submit where no possible reason or obligation calls for their doing anything of the sort.

As a rule these meetings took place at Mordaunt, but now and then Elly was allowed to go over to Redcombe, so the Cathers' place was called, and spend the afternoon there with Algernon, and eat as many of the piles of strawberries and cream

and hot cakes got ready for her by Mrs. Cathers as she could conveniently achieve.

It was a pretty place, with a good deal of wood about it. The house, too,—by an anomaly commoner, perhaps, than would readily be admitted—was a dozen times less pretentious, and a dozen times more solidly estimable as a domicile than Mordaunt. It was of dark red brick, with the jambs and mouldings of greyish stone. It had been bought by this boy's grandfather, and been placed by him in the hands of a very eminent firm of decorators, who had proceeded to carry out their own ideas with that scrupulous exactitude which, even in that comparatively darkened epoch, seemed to lift the pattern of chair legs, and the due proportioning of carpets to bare floors, quite into the region of the higher morals. Old Mr. Cathers had never proposed to inhabit it himself, and his son had not lived to do so. When he died, it was still in the hands of the decorators, and it was not until a year afterwards that Mrs.

Cathers and her boy took up their abode in it.

That good lady's presence had not done much to modify its aspect, or to impress her own personality upon it. She had sprinkled a few antimacassars and worsted-work stools about; had hung a crayon drawing of herself, and a blue china medallion of her son upon one of the panelled walls of the dining-room, also a coloured photograph of her husband's tomb in the drawing-room. There were a few other decorative efforts in the same direction, but they did not amount to much. She lived in her own house—Algernon's, she never forgot that it was Algernon's—more as a visitor than an inmate, and never allowed herself to take liberties with it. She did not in her secret soul like it. Its gloom oppressed her. The dark oak; the serious-looking pictures: the dim hangings; the self-contained sober carpets; the immense cost of everything, even to the snuff-boxes on the table, or the Dresden shepherds and

shepherdess which ogled one another across the mantelpiece—it all alarmed and made her uncomfortable. Housemaids were so careless, and it was dreadful to think of the loss which Algernon might at any moment suffer if one of them was to let any of those things slip through her fingers. Had she had her own choice, she would have preferred to live where house-keeping was a less terribly recondite matter, and where there were more abundant opportunities for neighbourliness. It was incumbent, however, that Algernon should be brought up as a country gentleman, and as his health would not admit of his being sent to a public school, it was the more indispensable that no jot or tittle of the orthodox programme should in any other respect be omitted. She stifled her yawns, therefore, poor lady, as she could, and sat in her best clothes all through the long weary afternoons, while the wood-pigeons cooed melodiously outside, and the sun slanted in broad sleepy bands over the grass

and river, waiting, waiting, waiting for the visitors who never, never came.

Under these circumstances it may be imagined whether she welcomed Elly Mordaunt! That energetic young lady, whose acquaintance with the fine arts was distinctly limited, concerned herself little with the house or its contents, but the river, and its boats, and the horses in the stable won her heart's best admiration, and instinctively, perhaps, prompted a keener sense of their owner's merits. At first, it is true, these possessions proved in some respect a source of discord rather than otherwise. The beautiful Algernon, whose training had not been in the best of schools, was inclined to show off his possessions in rather undesirable fashion—hectoring the servants, bullying dogs and horses, and generally exhibiting himself as unmistakably master. He was very quick, though, and had a knack of picking up the tone of those he was with, and when Lady Eleanor Mordaunt had once or twice informed him, in good

round unmistakable English, that only cads and cowards did *that* sort of thing, he quickly changed his note, and affected rather a nonchalant and airy tone about his possessions. Her piano playing might be defective, but he was not long in acquiring a wholesome awe and even alarm of his playmate's moral judgments.

They disagreed about everything conceivable, yet they remained fairly good friends all the while. Elly, for instance, was fond of quoting Major Lawrence's opinion about this, that, and the other; dilating upon what he had done or told her; upon what he and she were going next to do together; whereas Algernon Cathers—who fled like a little dog whose tail had been trodden on when he discerned so much as a shadow of that formidable personage—took upon himself at a safe distance to turn up his classical nose at the Major's pretensions. What was he, he should like to know? A common Major—not even in the Guards, or the cavalry, or any gentlemanly regiment, but

commanding nasty dirty blacks in India; living, too, in a little tumble-down hovel in which *he* wouldn't put one of his game-keepers! He wondered at her for having anything to say to such a person.

Whereat Elly, who invariably blazed up like a little fire-brand in defence of her friends, would fly into a towering passion. Of course, he was in the army, and if he preferred blacks to whites, why shouldn't he? Probably they were much *nicer!* Every man who was worth anything was in the army, or had some profession. She would have had one if she had been a man, indeed, she was not at all sure that she wouldn't as it was, only she supposed she wouldn't be let go to sea, which was what she would have liked best. What profession did he, Algernon, mean to have? Did he mean to be a painter, or a sculptor, or a musician? she didn't say because he couldn't be a soldier or a sailor, but that was her private opinion. Whereupon the beautiful Algernon would disdainfully disclaim the smallest intention

of being anything of the sort. "Gentlemen employed painters and musicians, they didn't become them themselves," he declared with an emphasis worthy of Lord Chesterfield.

One day she told him that if he could find nothing else to do he had better go into Parliament. She had been reading the newspapers, and it was clearly the best thing to do for any one who did not like work. "You have nothing to do but to sit on a bench all night with your hat on, listening to speeches. I suppose even *you* could do *that?*" she added loftily.

To which Algernon replied complacently, that very possibly he might go into Parliament, but if so, he would certainly sit in the House of Lords; and upon being indignantly told that that was impossible, since only peers sat there: Very well, he knew that perfectly, he said, and he was going to be a peer. Any fellow who had money enough could be made a peer if he chose; the Government were only too thankful; they were always looking for

people of that kind! which showed that he, too, had studied his politics to some purpose.

And while all this was going on, and John Lawrence's leave was hour by hour growing shorter, Mrs. Cathers sat with her hand in her new satin lap, nodding her head with sleepy satisfaction, and dreaming beautiful dreams of the future. She did not, however, speak of these dreams when she went to visit Lady Mordaunt, partly from an awe which she never quite got over, partly from an instinct that it might be unwise to do so. In this she was probably right; indeed, it is safe to say that had her familiarity been greater, or her motherly discretion less, many things "still hanging in the stars" might have been very different.

CHAPTER V.

The last few grains in the hour-glass, we know, are proverbially swift in escaping, and the last two months of the Major's stay in England fled down the slope of Time, and were lost with a celerity which seemed to him nothing short of diabolic. It had come now to the last week, the last day, actually to the very last evening. He and Elly had been together nearly all day, and he was solemnly pledged to dine at Mordaunt. It was wild, gusty, wintry weather, but they had none the less taken their last sail together in the *Arethusa*, disembarking from which, they had walked along the cliffs to Mordaunt leaving the boat to be taken home by Phil Judd, who, now that the Major was actually

leaving, was inclined to think that there might on the whole be a worse master than even a besotted naturalist.

Elly had been in the utmost state of depression all the afternoon. Towards evening, however, her spirits suddenly took an upward turn, or she chose to exhibit her grief by a wild uproariousness, of which she had only rarely exhibited specimens.

"Children are 'kittle cattle,' as you once said," Lady Mordaunt observed, looking after her as she went careering out of the room to prepare for the dinner, which on this special occasion she was to share with them. "That child will be sobbing her eyes out to-morrow, and flying at me like a little spitfire if I so much as look at her."

"I hope not," he answered, smiling.

"Oh yes, she will. I know her so well now. It is when she is unhappy that she is invariably naughtiest. She finds it a good receipt, I suppose, for drying her

tears. Other people, for that matter, have tried the same expedient before her."

John Lawrence did not reply, but his face softened as he, too, looked towards the door.

"Her coming to you has been a success, has it not?" he said presently.

"I suppose so. It has humanized her; or you have."

"And for you?"

"For me? Well, it has given me something additional to care for, if that is what you mean. Whether that is a benefit or not remains to be seen!"

"I shouldn't have thought there could be any doubt about it," he said, with more gravity than generally marked their dialogues.

"Shouldn't you? I should have thought you knew better. However it may be in an improved world, every fresh ounce of affection in this one means a fresh ton of care, and so you will certainly know by the time you come to my age."

"My danger does not seem likely to lie in that direction," he replied rather drily. "If having no one to care for, or to care for one is all that is requisite for happiness, I seem likely to be the most successful old man of my period!"

She looked at him with a sudden gentleness, which softened the vividness of her glance. "Poor old John!" she exclaimed. "You are as obstinate as a mule though!" she added energetically. "Obstinate as regards your own interests, which is the worst and most perverted form of the complaint. If you would have let me get down Maida Rich, and shown yourself decently civil, you might have snapped your fingers at those wretched people in India. Maida Rich is one of the best girls I know, and would have jumped at you, if you would have held out a finger."

"Miss Rich is too good, or you are in her ill-used name. I shall be a pensioner if I live long enough, but I had just as soon not begin by being a wife's."

"Bosh! stuff! I wonder you're not ashamed of giving utterance to such rubbish. I have no patience with that sort of talk—like a woman who tells you that she prefers poverty to wealth in the abstract—prefers wet omnibuses, and dyed bonnet-strings!—Either she is a humbug, or she doesn't know what she is talking about! And as for you—what better luck do you suppose can befall an unfortunate girl with money than to marry an honest man? They are not to be found, believe me, upon every bush!"

He shook his head. Before there was time, however, for a rejoinder, if he had intended to make one, Elly had come back, and the conversation was suspended.

Two hours later they were sitting round the fire in Lady Mordaunt's little sitting-room. The wind had been rising steadily, and was now howling outside in great intermittent rushes; sweeping along the gusty corridor; assaulting the defenceless plaster statues in the garden, and knocking

a loose branch of clematis with quick imperative taps against the window, as if then and there demanding entrance.

Lady Mordaunt drew her shawl around her with a shiver. "This time three days you will be upon that horible sea, will you not?" she said.

"Yes, we sail at five on Friday."

"Oh, I wish it was me! I wish, I wish it was me, me, me!" Elly exclaimed in a sort of chant, tossing her arms back behind her head and shaking out her brown mane over her eyes.

"Thank you, my dear!" said her grandmother.

"Oh, it isn't that I want to get away from you, grandmamma! But to be on board a ship—a big ship full of sailors and people, and to have the waves roaring and tearing past, like a pack of hounds after something they want to catch, and to know that you have the whole world in front of you! The real, big world, not just a few fields or a town, or a place like this,

but the world itself: the water first, and then the new land!"

"And be lying all the time horribly sick in your berth, and wishing to goodness you were back again in the school-room learning about the Feudal system," Lady Mordaunt suggested.

"Oh, but one wouldn't be sick," Elly said indignantly; "*I* shouldn't, at least. I've never been sick once all the times and times we've been out boating; at least, yes, I was once, but then that was in a cave. We shouldn't be going into any caves, you know, on our way to India. Besides, *John* isn't sick!" she added by way of a crowning argument.

"Since when have you taken to calling that big man John, I should like to know, young lady?" her grandmother enquired, waiving for the moment the question of sea-sickness.

Elly blushed a little. "I always call him John," she said defiantly; "at least generally. There isn't any harm in my

doing so either, is there — John?" she added, with a glance at her grandmother out of the corners of her eyes, and a mutinous curve of her upper lip.

"I fail myself, certainly, to see the heinousness of it," he said with a laugh. "But then, you know, those two little shrimps, my sisters, call me so, or as near the name as they can get. So that I have got over the insult of it, if it is one."

Elly only tossed back her head, her mouth retained its mutinous curves, her grey eyes gleaming rather suspiciously as they caught and reflected the fire-light.

There was not much more talk. At half-past ten the Major got up, pausing with his elbow resting against the velvet of the mantelpiece, his eyes glancing regretfully round at the little interior which had so often befriended his loneliness. Lady Mordaunt sat still in her arm-chair, her face set in its most regretful curves, a regret not without a spice of irritation.

"Go, go! get along with you do!" she

said at last, as her eyes caught his. "Why on earth do you linger about your going? If one *is* to have a tooth out, the sooner it goes the better. If only I had been consulted about the making of the world! Afternoon callers, bad teeth, good-byes, bores of all sorts should have been nipped in the making, and never allowed to exist to plague us."

Elly meanwhile had darted away to look out of the window. She was still apparently in the wildest spirits, jumping from one foot to the other, and energetically humming a tune, a thing without much melody, her musical capabilities being of the smallest.

"Come and say good-bye to your friend, miss, since it must be so," her grandmother said, getting up with an effort from her chair, John holding out his hand to aid her, which she retained in her own until they reached the door.

Elly followed them into the hall, or vestibule, which was shut in by double doors. Crockett came forward to help the

Major on with his coat; then flung open the two doors, letting in a rush of wild moisture-laden air which seemed in a minute to fill the whole house. Lady Mordaunt shivered, and turned to retreat, but Elly, profiting by the occasion, dashed into the open air and stood there laughing, while the wind blew up the masses of her hair into a dense brown bush above her head.

"Come back, you troublesome child!" said her grandmother. "Send her in, John."

Instead of obeying, Elly, however, only shook her hair into still wilder confusion, and darted away down the avenue, her laugh ringing back upon the air as she ran.

John followed, wondering as he did so whether he was in for another chase, like the one they had once before had over the same ground, a more troublesome one, seeing that the night was absolutely pitch dark. This time the fugitive did not get very far. When he came up to her she had

sat down upon a fallen log, and when he spoke to her, though she answered in her most jaunty tones, her voice told that she was, if not crying, at any rate upon the verge of tears.

"Go back, Elly dear," he said hastily. "It is not a fit night for you to be out, with nothing extra on either. You will catch cold."

"I don't care whether I do or not. It's quite time I *did* have a cold! I'm tired of being always well. It will be something to do!"

"You will vex your grandmother, and you will vex me."

"I don't care!—I mean about vexing you. Why should I? You don't mind vexing me. I don't like you."

"You told me so once before, I remember."

"I didn't mean it then, but I *do* mean it now. No, that isn't true," she added, honesty coming to the rescue. "Perhaps I did mean it then, but I don't now. I

only hate you for going away. Why will you go?"

"You know very well that I cannot help it. I hate it probably rather more than you do, but I have no choice."

Elly made a grimace, half-hidden in the darkness. "Everybody one wants to keep, goes, and only the people one don't care about, stay," she said, summing up her experience of life in a tone of gloom. "And I think it is very, very—horrid!" Her breath came quick, it was evidently as much as she could do to keep from sobbing.

John Lawrence was unable to resist the impulse; he drew her towards him, and kissed her tear-stained cheek.

"You won't forget me, little Elly, will you?" he asked.

She pushed him away with a gesture of indignation. It was the doubt that angered her, but he thought it was the kiss, and reproached himself accordingly.

"When will you be back?" she enquired eagerly.

"In seven years, I suppose. Hardly sooner."

"Seven years!" She made a rapid calculation. "Seven years! why I shall be—what?—nineteen then!" she exclaimed with a sort of awe.

"An elderly person, in fact."

"Yes. Oh, do try and come back sooner, please; please try," she cried, plucking at his sleeve, and holding it in her eagerness. "Only think—seven years! What is one to do with seven years? It is a lifetime!"

"You have plenty of things to do. You have to grow up; to grow wise; to take great care of your grandmother; to learn many things you don't know now. The time will not be too long, I assure you."

Elly made another grimace. "It is *dreadful!*" she exclaimed despairingly. "Like looking into a great big room, and seeing only bare walls. There is nothing—*nothing*—left that I care for. Grandmamma

is very kind, but of course she's different, and I don't see anything of Mordaunt now, except just for a bit in the holidays, besides, he's only a little boy; and I don't care for any of my cousins — not a bit, I'd just as soon not have them, so that there's absolutely no one left except Algernon Cathers, and I am not really so *very* fond of him."

"I should hope not indeed," the Major exclaimed indignantly.

"He is not bad; I mean I don't *mind* him. But he is—well, he is different."

John Lawrence did not immediately answer. The mention of that boy's name had somehow spoilt the pleasant pain of this parting with his little playfellow. It was ridiculous, but so it was. The contrast of their two images had something for him insufferable. It even crossed his mind that he would speak to Lady Mordaunt about it. He certainly was not a proper companion for her.

They were walking back now to the house

and had nearly reached the porch, where that lady's figure was visible against the glow of light behind. Just as they were coming within radius of the latter, Elly made a snatch at his hand, not at all in caressing fashion, held it vehemently for a moment, then pushed it away, and darted like a greyhound past her grandmother into the house.

Lady Mordaunt lingered for a few minutes longer, despite the wildness of the wind which swept around her and nearly extinguished the lamp which hung in the porch.

"Go in," he said hastily. "Don't stay. Dear, kind, best of friends, thank you a thousand times, and good-bye."

"Good-bye, John. God bless you, dear!" she said, and turned away.

It was not quite his last greeting, however. He was turning the corner of the wing, when a small barred window, nearly on a level with the ground, was suddenly pushed open, and a head covered with a

tangle of brown hair appeared between the bars. "Good-bye, John! Don't stay long!" Elly's not very melodious voice chanted. This was followed by something which began as a laugh but ended as a sob, in the middle of which the window was violently banged down again, and the head disappeared.

And it was with this brilliant refrain sounding loudest and clinging closest to his memory, that John Lawrence finally departed.

END OF VOL. I.

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